



















THE INCOGNITO LIBRARY

## THE INCOGNITO LIBRARY.

---

A series of small books by representative writers, whose names will for the present not be given.

In this series will be included the authorized American editions of the future issues of Mr. Unwin's "PSEUDONYM LIBRARY," which has won for itself a noteworthy prestige.

32mo, limp cloth, each 50 cents.

- I. THE SHEN'S PIGTAIL, and other cues of Anglo-China Life, by Mr. M——.
- II. THE HON. STANBURY AND OTHERS, by Two.
- III. LESSER'S DAUGHTER, by Mrs. Andrew Dean.
- IV. A HUSBAND OF NO IMPORTANCE, by Rita.

These will be followed by  
HELEN, by Vocs.

A  
HUSBAND  
OF  
NO IMPORTANCE

BY

RITA, pseud. of  
*Eliza M. J. (G) Humphreys*

---

G. P. PUTNAM'S SONS

NEW YORK

LONDON

27 West Twenty-third Street

24 Bedford Street, Strand

The Knickerbocker Press

1894

PR  
4809  
H93  
H8

COPYRIGHT, 1894  
BY  
G. P. PUTNAM'S SONS

Electrotyped, Printed and Bound by  
The Knickerbocker Press, New York  
G. P. PUTNAM'S SONS

## CONTENTS.

---

I.—“THE WORLD THAT AMUSES US.” . . .	3
II.—CACKLE . . . .	20
III.—A SERIOUS “QUART D’HEURE” . . . .	32
IV.—A BATTLE OF OPINIONS	48
V.—THREE TYPES . . .	62
VI.—SOME REFLECTIONS, AND A RESULT . . . .	79
VII.—MISGIVINGS . . . .	93
VIII.—AN “ARTICLE” DEFINITE AND DEFINED . . . .	105
IX.—A WHOLESOME DESPAIR	116
X.—AND YET ANOTHER “TYPE.” . . . .	128
XI.—“THROUGH A MAN’S EYES” . . . .	144
XII.—A “FIRST NIGHT” . . .	157
XIII.—THE MORAL OF THE PLAY	171



A HUSBAND OF NO  
IMPORTANCE





# A HUSBAND OF NO IMPORTANCE.

## I.

“THE WORLD THAT AMUSES US.”

“AMUSING? . . . isn't it?”  
said the Woman.

There was scorn in her accent and her eye. Scorn, too, in the curl of a curved lip, which seemed to emphasise an opinion with an interrogation.

“Well, I think it is, *very*,” said the Man.

They had not been introduced, but that was a mere detail to Mrs. Hex Rashleigh. She was a woman who never stopped to consider trifles. If she saw a person she liked she spoke to him, or her, as the case

might be. The acquaintance was then allowed to drift or terminate, according to the interest awakened. She looked at the man to whom she had spoken, and saw that he really meant what he had said.

He positively looked—amused. Amused by this caravansary of strange creatures who were crowding, elbowing, pushing, and chattering at the top of their voices. Amused by overdressed Jewesses, painted actresses of no particular standing, long-haired artists struggling for fame, musicians, male and female, longing for a hearing—anyhow, *anywhere*, so long as they could lift up their voices on high. Amused by these self-important *parvenues*, who fondly imagined they were in society—this vulgar, gossiping clique who made themselves the centre of their own universe of boredom !

His blue eyes were dancing with fun and enjoyment as they met her puzzled glance. He was young, good-looking, finely built. Face and figure bore the unmistakable stamp of birth

and breeding. He looked so *out* of all this, and yet he was—amused.

“I think they’re all detestable,” she said, after a pause. “I wish I had not come. I only did it out of curiosity. . . . I wanted to study this section of society. I’m on the look-out for characters.”

“Do you write?” he asked, regarding her with evident interest.

“I do. That’s not very wonderful nowadays.”

“No,” he agreed. “I’ve been thinking lately the wonder would come in to find a woman who did *not* write or paint, or something. Faith! we poor men are being driven out of the field entirely.”

“Ah! you’re an Irishman,” she said quickly.

“I am,” he answered, “affecting” a brogue, though he had it not. “Strange how we betray our nationality. I’ve heard people puzzle themselves over a Frenchman, a German, a Swede, and then solve the riddle satisfactorily by announcing, ‘You’re a foreigner.’”

She laughed. "A moment ago I should have been puzzled to decide about yourself. That you were so easily amused might have given me a clue."

"Well, we do get more fun out of life than you sober-minded English folk," he said. "I keep that instinct alive for sake of the old country. You'll be shocked if I tell you I couldn't resist a street row to this day."

He said it with that faint accent which had seemed to amuse her, and she looked at him again with some curiosity as to his position or profession. He was the picture of aristocratic indolence, and she hated indolent young men. The business of her life was a crusade against their vanity and general uselessness.

Meanwhile he regarded her from under long lashes which she summed up as "womanish," though the eyes themselves appeared intent on admiring his patent leather boots.

"I wonder," he said at last, "if I've read any of your books."

"I'm sure not," she said. "They are not what is called popular. Not the sort of book that women talk about at dinner parties, and critics slate mercilessly."

"Then you must write with a purpose."

Her lip curled. "I should be sorry, certainly, to write *without*."

"It's waste of time," he said coolly. "It only means boring people and losing your temper over unappreciated efforts. Confess you've lost yours—often."

Mrs. Hex Rashleigh was almost taken off her balance.

She was a very well-known person, and, sometimes, a very important one. She wrote really clever books. She was also a journalist, and had once edited a magazine. She contributed to the *Fortnightly* and the *Quarterly*. She went to everything worth going to in London, and knew all its celebrities by sight and most of them personally. Therefore it goes without saying that she was a person of brains and

talent. A woman of importance even in these days of important women, and yet she found herself at a loss what to make of a young man.

"No," she said at last. "To quote our Laureate—

‘ One needs must love the highest.’

I love it, and work for it. I don't expect appreciation. Worthier and greater women than I have lived and died without it."

"You've not told me what you have written yet."

"I don't advertise my wares," she said brusquely. "You can find out my books very easily if you have a mind to. But perhaps you don't read novels?"

"Only Lever's," he said gravely. "Anything else is beyond me."

She flashed a keen glance at the imperturbable face. Then took him at his own valuation.

"I should have thought so," she said sarcastically. "But what's going on now?"

There was a faint stir amongst the crowd, a sibilant whisper of "Hush—h" from an anxious-faced hostess.

Mrs. Hex Rashleigh looked over a sea of bonnets and hats. "Oh! a recitation. I'm so sick of them!" she observed.

"Are you? I'm sorry for that: I enjoy them above all things."

"Hush—h—h" came again across the room.

Mrs. Hex Rashleigh frowned, and made a mental note against suburban manners for the benefit of *The World's Mirror* and *Up-to-Date*, for both of which she wrote.

The reciter stood up. She was a small woman with a babyish face, a pile of grey hair arranged in irregular sausage-rolls, a large hat, and an affected manner.

"I'll bet it's about babies," murmured Mrs. Rashleigh. "She looks that sort. '*Papa's Letter!*' Oh dear! For the hundred and ninety-ninth time! . . . I wish I could escape."

“Rough on the poor little thing. She’s not half bad,” drawled the Irishman, lazily.

A few indignant glances shot right and left at them showed that the reciter had friends in their neighbourhood who were justly indignant at such criticism.

They resigned themselves to listen to the childish babble that was more suited to the nursery than the drawing-room, but then Northerton was rather behind the times.

It was a suburb or neighbourhood that had broken out in sections, and spread itself from the main body through various channels and arteries until it had reached a region touching on Wormwood Common. Yet still it clung to a sort of baptismal certificate that proclaimed it a relation of more fashionable districts. Set going with such irreproachable relatives, Northerton had launched forth into splendid mansions, tall terraces, and semi-detached villas. It called its streets “gardens.” Almost every one of



them was "something Gardens."  
"So much more style about *that* than Terrace or Road," said the inhabitants.

The houses were imposing, and boasted of all the modern improvements. The rents were moderate. The district soon became populated, and perambulators and "go-carts" were a common sight.

When a neighbourhood boasts of imposing domiciles, moderate rents, and vast caravans of infantile humanity, it generally means a descent of the—not *lost*, but living tribes of Israel.

They come—they stay—they conquer.

It was so with this delightful suburb. Mrs. Levi, and Mrs. Moses, and Mrs. Nathan, and Mrs. Korah, Dathan, and Abiram flocked thither on one another's heels, and assured each other a hundred times a week that the air was *so good* for the children, the train *so convenient* for their lords and masters, and the fish-shops *so cheap*. Nothing could be more suitable for a new colony!

And the houses? One really *had* one's money's worth.

They were large, well-designed, airy, and "up-to-date" in the way of electric bells and conservatories and front doors. Northerton was especially great in the matter of front doors, with stained glass panels and elaborate brass knockers. On the whole, the Semitic section of the suburb were much delighted with its advantages, and their Saturday morning devotional promenade made quite a brilliant spectacle and a convenient *rendezvous* for the various tribes.

Occasionally the Semitic section entertained.

They did it well, and expense was no object. True they resorted to many little stratagems for procuring artistes or amusements. But then this might have been due to prejudice. The Israelite, as a rule, has but a poor opinion of any human being who resorts to art for a livelihood—knowing well that it is *not* a money-making profession.

So when it came to entertaining their friends they put the matter on a footing of favour. The professional singer or player would not receive *terms* . . . but if at any time they gave a concert the Section would rally round them in the matter of selling or taking tickets.

The professionals came—some out of curiosity, some because they wanted “to be heard”—it mattered not by whom as long as there was an audience. Everything must have a beginning, so they accepted invitations to Northerton “At Homes.”

Mrs. Hex Rashleigh had been decoyed thither this warm June afternoon by a friend who said it would do for “copy.” The friend was rich, popular, good-looking, and loved to go “everywhere.” She had determined on writing a wonderful book—some day. Such a book as had never yet been written. A book that would make modern authors look to their laurels. But it wanted a vast amount of preparation. She had already invented

some twenty or thirty plots, but was not *quite* satisfied with any of them. Meantime she wrote short tales for the magazines. Mrs. Rashleigh and Mrs. Despard were great friends. They were almost always together, and almost always on the search for new experiences. What they had expected to find in Northerton they alone knew.

Having drifted asunder in the crowd Mrs. Rashleigh had opened a conversation with Blake Beverley, as she had a trick of doing with people if she liked the look of them. By the time the baby-faced reciter with the grey curls had finished her harrowing description of a postage stamp and a pair of runaway horses, Mrs. Rashleigh was convinced that the young man was worth cultivating.

“Do you live in this neighbourhood?” she asked, under cover of applause.

“Oh, no. . . . I live at the other end of the North Pole.”

“The North Pole?” She reflected, and looked bewildered.

“Did n’t you know? We’re almost at it. It’s about a quarter of a mile off. . . . A great place on a Bank Holiday, I assure you.”

Mrs. Rashleigh felt indignant. This young man was treating her to “chaff,” evidently. She did not like it.

“I mentioned I had never been in this part of the world before,” she said frigidly. “Judging from the people *here*,” with a comprehensive sweep of her hand, “I seem to have strayed into a New Jerusalem.”

“There has been an exodus lately from Maida Vale,” he answered. “Result—University Gardens.”

“Is that the name?”

“Yes ; not very applicable perhaps, but there *are* a few Christians scattered about. Note that auburn-haired woman with her daughters ‘gathered like chickens under her wings.’ They’ve sat in that corner the whole afternoon—and behold, oh ! wonder of wonders—a parson ! Surely he has n’t come on a ‘mission for converting female Israel !’ ”

She laughed. "I know him, he goes everywhere. He is liberal-minded, except to his own parish. But that's neither here nor there. He's only setting an example."

"I thought it was a fashion he was setting. His coat has been a source of wonder to me. I took it for *moire antique*, but I believe it's—alpaca."

"Have you ever remarked how many human faces resemble different animals, or birds? One could classify his very easily —"

"Yes, indeed; if he *bleated* it would not surprise me.

"And, there again," she said, with a glance at a portly female, satin-robed and purple-faced. "Bovine, is n't it?"

"The safe and homely type, according to modern writers."

"Take care," she said. "For aught you know you may be treading on dangerous ground."

"Oh! I'm sure you're strong-minded—I could tell that by your chin. But I hope not *too* advanced."

"That depends," she said gravely, "on what you term 'advanced.' But I scarcely think this is the time or place for such a discussion. First we've been uncharitable, now we're drifting into personalities. It's time to part."

"Don't you ever discuss personalities then?"

"With kindred souls, yes."

"The fact of our meeting here, and mutually abusing our entertainment, shows we have something in common."

"That does not sound nice," she said, with a sudden flush of colour. "Why did *you* come?"

"Because I was asked. Our hostess as you know—or perhaps you don't know—is a German lady. I met her at a big luncheon in the West End. I was induced to sing. She got introduced to me. The next day I had a card and here I am."

"But the—inducement?"

"Pure curiosity, I assure you. I only know one person in the crowd."

"Is that that woman over there

who's been making eyes at you so long?"

He started and coloured slightly. "You flatter me. No—I have n't the honour of her acquaintance."

"You soon will then. I can read character—at least that of my own sex. That woman means to know you."

He laughed. "Well, I don't mind. She's good-looking—fair—fine figure. Rather my style."

"Good-looking!" There was withering contempt in the voice. "A face like a cat's—small screwed-up eyes, dyed hair, a coarse mouth. Figure—a dressmaker's model. How blind men are!"

"I do believe she is coming this way," he said.

He had noted every point enumerated, but he was bent on "drawing out" his new acquaintance. She amused him immensely, and he was longing to know who she really was.

"I told you she meant to know you."



"I feel alarmed. You're a sort of sorceress. You're not going to leave me unprotected, are you?"

"I see my friend over there. I hope she's going away. I've had enough of this. . . . Your fate is approaching."

"One thing more," he entreated. "In what category of natural history would you place that approaching fate?"

She flashed one swift glance at his mirthful eyes, then rose from the seat she had so long occupied.

"A Bird of Prey!" she said significantly.

## II.

### CAKLE.

SOME quarter of an hour later, two women were leaning back in their victoria and satirising University Gardens with that commendable spirit of nineteenth century charity which "thinketh evil" of every one and everybody—and says it too.

Mrs. Hex Rashleigh was in a bad temper, and she let her friend know that she considered this an afternoon wasted.

"Vulgar—stupid—hateful!" she repeated. "All Jews ever want you to do is to appraise their household gods, eat their food, and admire their wives' jewels. What a set! How could you go there?"

"Oh, I'm not a bit proud," laughed pretty little Mrs. Despard, safe in the possession of irreproachable lineage, and equally irreproachable fortunes. "I go anywhere and everywhere. Contrasts are amusing. Buckingham Palace one day and Peckham Rye the next. The cream and the skim milk alternately, . . . that's half the pleasure of life."

"I can't say I find pleasure a very inventive god," observed Mrs. Rashleigh. "And as for skim-milk . . ." She shuddered and opened her lace sunshade as the carriage swept along the broad high-road. "What sort of people *live* here?" she asked contemptuously.

"Oh, my dear, if it comes to that, much the same sort as ourselves—as far as morals go. I cannot give you a *carte du pays* of the settlement. I've only been to it some half-dozen times. But I take it that each little tract of country has its own special set, its own circle of gossip, its own centre of ambition. You see Mayfair and Mile End are not very un-

like after all. It's only a question of a little less money, a little less extravagance, and the City Road to shop in instead of Bond Street."

"I beg your pardon. It's a question of a possible and impossible life!"

Mrs. Hex Rashleigh had a *bijou* flat in the neighbourhood of Sloane Street. To her this region of dull respectability and incessant omnibuses seemed as a very Sahara.

"There are a few military people," went on Mrs. Despard, whom all her friends called Véloutine, "and a colony of retired Indians—I don't mean savages, you know—the sort of people who pride themselves on their curries and *kitcherees*; who talk of Calcutta as a lost paradise, and are quite unable to believe that their own importance is insignificant after forty years of native kow-towing and official dignity. Would they amuse you?"

"Not in the least. I know the class. Vain, selfish, arrogant, for ever bringing up legends of past

glories and sprinkling Hindustani about their conversation by way of 'local colour.' "

"You're in a bad humour, Marion. Did it really bore you so much? I saw you talking very animatedly once—to a man. Who was he?"

"I don't know. Irish, I believe. A singer, he told me."

"Impossible; he had n't the artist look. I thought he was an army man. Why 'did n't you ask his name?"

"I did n't feel sufficiently interested in him."

"He was the only decent specimen of the male sex there. He looked out of his element, I thought."

"On the contrary, he said he was immensely amused."

"You say that as if the fact annoyed you. I wish I had 'had the chance of speaking. A singer, did you say? I don't know his face at all. I saw that awful Loosely woman get hold of him before we left. Trust her for tracking."

“Who is she?” asked Mrs. Rashleigh eagerly. “One of the ‘locals?’”

“Yes. I know a neighbour of hers, so I’ve heard a good deal about her. She’s the sort of woman who puts on a pink apron and waters her plants in the balcony every morning, trilling little ‘*chansonnettes*’ all the time. She has a house in that big square we’ve just passed. The remarkable feature of the house is a smoking-room—a feminine one. It opens on a balcony—balcony on steps—steps on garden—garden on Square. So convenient!”

“What on earth do you mean, Tina?”

Mrs. Despard laughed softly. “If you knew Laura Loosely you wouldn’t ask. She’s a little too much even for me. But I mustn’t talk scandal—though this is the very hotbed and forcing-house of that noxious plant. You look quite solemn. What is it?”

Mrs. Rashleigh answered vaguely. Her mind was preoccupied. She

was reflecting on "types," and wondering why the Bird of Prey had suggested itself to her mind. What had she said to him? How stupid not to have asked his name!

"Shall we do the Park, or go to the Club?" asked Mrs. Despard as the victoria turned into the Bayswater Road at last.

"You might set me down at the Club. I've some letters to write, and the column to do for the *Sturm und Drang*."

"Very well."

Mrs. Despard gave the necessary order to the coachman, and they drove straight on towards Oxford Street.

"What do you do to-night?" she asked presently.

"I was thinking of the 'Circle' for an hour or two. I've not been once this season; and to-night they've something special."

"Well, I'll go too. But you'll come across a lot of our late friends again. I don't know how they've managed to get in, but they have."

"Oh, it's like everything else *men* manage," exclaimed Mrs. Rashleigh, contemptuously. "The thing was first started for workers only. One had to write, or paint, or act, or sing, before one could claim admission. Now, just look at the crew that have managed to get in as members; and the lady secretary resigns, and then some one's husband takes it up, and it's more a man's affair now than a woman's."

"I hear it's better this season. More select."

"Select!" exclaimed Mrs. Rashleigh, shrugging her shoulders. "Who wants it to be *select*? We intended it as a common meeting ground for authors and artists, as I said. There was no nonsense about dress. You could go in cotton or tweed if you liked. Now they're all trying to outvie each other for the sake of getting a line in a fashion paper, and you meet women with spines instead of brains, and diamonds instead of talent! They'll be introducing skirt-dancing next,



or wanting the cotillon and champagne suppers."

Mrs. Despard looked amused. "Decidedly," she said, "the wind is in the east with you to-day. I won't take you to Northerton again."

"No, please don't. A little of that goes a long way. . . . By the way, what did you say was the name of that woman—with the . . . house—that-Jack-built arrangement, you know?"

"Oh, Loosely—Mrs. Loosely. . . . I don't know how even the 'colonists' tolerate her! There'll be an open scandal some day; but she's been very clever as yet. Manages to throw dust in a good many eyes besides her husband's——"

"Oh, there *is* a husband?"

"Of course, my dear. That's why she's so safe. He's nearly as retiring and—useful an appendage as your own. I always expect to hear you announced as 'Mrs. Hex Rashleigh and—her husband' when you do put in an appearance together. It's not often."

Mrs. Rashleigh shrugged her shoulders. "Well, he's not of much importance, you must allow. I've always had my own way and done what I wanted. Why shouldn't I? There's no nonsense about me. I'm not the sort of woman who can only run straight when she's *driven*! . . . Now, you—you're full of sentiment and romance. You like being made love to. I—loathe it. Men to me are only abstract things. Life is a history of their vileness, cruelty, and tyranny. I made up my mind years ago that I would never put my head under the heel of one. I should hate to think my husband was my intellectual superior."

"Oh, well, we all know he's not *that*," laughed her friend. "But don't mount your hobby for my benefit, dear. I know your opinions pretty well. Give them to the *Sturm und Drang*, and try to teach your down-trodden German sisterhood the lessons of independence and emancipation."

"A nation of *Haus-Fraus* ruled

by a despot are not likely to learn even the alphabet of such a lesson as we are teaching," answered Mrs. Rashleigh.

Then the victoria stopped, and she got out and entered a large and imposing-looking building, and ascended to the first floor. On the door was inscribed in elaborate capitals, "The Woman's Reconstitution Club."

The room which Mrs. Rashleigh entered was large and comfortable, but very plainly furnished with writing-tables, chairs, book-cases, and stands with all the leading magazines and papers. A few lounges for lazy or tired members were the only approach to the feminine weakness of comfort.

A few women were reading. Two or three were busy with pen and papers. Mrs. Rashleigh nodded a general greeting, drew up a chair to a specially workmanlike table in a remote corner of the large room, and commenced to work.

No one spoke. The only sound

was the scratching of pens, or the rustle of a page as it was turned.

The Reconstitution Club was essentially a working club. One of use and service—no mere meeting ground for afternoon tea, illicit love-letters, and feminine scandal.

It was exclusive, and it was businesslike. Society laughed at it—but then it could afford to pay off Society in its own coin.

Here were concocted spicy “pars” which pointed the finger of scorn at fashionable sinners. Here the Small World was enlightened as to the doings of the Great World it adored at a respectful distance. Here were formulated the bombshells of feminine anarchists who hated and despised the tyranny of Man, and, while accepting him as a necessity, would sweep him away as an obstacle to the programme of emancipation.

Here underpaid genius found a hearing, and overpaid mediocrity its level. Here all were helpers in one great cause, and agreed to work for it, fight for it—die for it, if need be!

A noble army of martyrs banded together by one common fate—the fate of sex—yet struggling boldly for Freedom, and determined to—get the Franchise.

Probably when they did get it they would only think it a bore and a nuisance, and forget their voting papers, and quarrel over the attentions of a particular candidate ; but that was unimportant at present.

They were working for an object, and Liberty seemed a beautiful ideal—an oasis of tranquil ease in the rush and fever and oppression of Modern Life.

To this noble institution Mrs. Hex Rashleigh stood in the proud position of Founder, Prime Minister, and General Propagator.

### III.

#### A SERIOUS "QUART D'HEURE."

MRS. HEX RASHLEIGH threw down her pen at last with an exclamation of impatience.

Her ideas would not flow ; her diction lacked its usual ease and fluency of expression. She felt restless, out of temper, dissatisfied. After all, even an Emancipated Woman can't get away from—moods. They are the bane of the sex, and cling to it in spite of abolished corsets and divided skirts.

Mrs. Rashleigh was the victim of a mood to-day, and it seriously interfered with her work.

She sighed, and glancing up from the scattered sheets of MSS., caught

sight of her own reflection in the one mirror that graced the room.

There had been a committee meeting on the subject of that mirror, and it had only been conceded with great reluctance. The sterner minded of Reconstitutionals had strongly opposed this aid to vanity, but an artful and good-looking member had suggested they surely might see if their bonnets were straight without harm to the cause. So the mirror took its place on the wall, and Mrs. Hex Rashleigh suddenly caught herself looking into it with a dim sense of disappointment.

It showed her a woman of some thirty or more years. A clear-cut, rather massive face ; brown hair taken severely off the brow ; and dark eyes—large, flashing eyes that seemed to say, “ Trust me.”

Not a beautiful face, certainly ; not one to be noted where golden locks and violet orbs found favour. It held strength and force instead of fascination—self-will, self-control, the power of organisation ; but one

looked in vain for tenderness, or that soft, caressing grace so essentially feminine.

Perhaps her life and surroundings had had much to do with this masculine tendency. Her youth had been spent in a household of weak men and frivolous women. She had grown up despising both.

Whatever talents she possessed had been neglected rather than trained, but hardship is no bad forcing-house after all, and she had educated herself on good models, and worked unceasingly for the one end she had in view.

She was now thirty-three, and had achieved much and hoped for more. Like many enthusiasts, she took a very one-sided view of her subject. Her ambitions were on a large scale, her talents above the average. She rushed at obstacles and overthrew them recklessly—if possible; denounced them, if not. More people feared her than loved her. She was so terribly outspoken and honest, that they shrank from her de-



nunciations even while cultivating her acquaintance.

Society is thin-skinned. It can't bear to hear things called by their proper names, and Mrs. Rashleigh never would call a spade an "implement of husbandry." Very few men liked her—married men especially. They said she was dangerous. The flail of her sarcasm beat them into powder, and her merciless irony made them feel decidedly uncomfortable.

They wondered how any man could have been bold enough to marry such a woman. They were sure they never could have done so.

Men as a rule make their own conception of the Weaker Sex its standard of perfection. When a woman answers their requirements they are satisfied she is all right. It is exceedingly difficult to convince them that she may do that and yet be all wrong.

Mr. Hex Rashleigh—as his wife decreed he should be called, instead of by his baptismal cognomen Hes-

keth—held that comparatively unimportant position in her life and household which the lawful possessor of Emancipated Woman is now destined to hold.

To tell the simple truth, Mrs. Rashleigh knew very little about him and cared less. She had had an ideal of manhood in her girlish days. It had been a combined essence of Hercules and Apollo, with a dash of King Arthur thrown in (Tennyson's King Arthur, which is a sublimatised essence of the real thing).

It is unnecessary to say she had never found that ideal. They don't walk the world now. Pot hats, masher collars, and burlesque actresses have much to answer for. They have made chivalry ludicrous and picturesqueness impossible.

Mr. Hex Rashleigh was really an excellent man ; clever too, if a little dreamy and unassertive. He was very proud of his wife and very fond of her, but he never dared to tell her so. She would have laughed in his face. She had married him because

she felt that marriage was her only chance of freedom from an unsuitable and distasteful environment. He was five years older than herself, and had an appointment in the War Office.

They had been married nearly ten years. Those years had meant a very active and important career for Mrs. Hex Rashleigh. A certain amount of talent and a skilful use of subjects brought her books into quite distinctive notice. She got to know the best literary and artistic people in London, and life became interesting as well as exciting.

Freedom had been the ideal of her life, and certainly her husband made no claim on her liberty, and interfered in no way with her projects.

He too had a club, and friends of congenial mind, and work of a nature his wife never guessed, and would never have credited him with the ability to execute.

They were really almost strangers to one another. Ample means permitted the domestic machinery to

roll smoothly, and when Mrs. Hex Rashleigh was "at home," or dined any one, the details of entertainment were irreproachable.

She was eccentric in her dress, but not unwarrantably so. She had a preference for tailor-made skirts and coats, because they were smart, neat, and serviceable, and in the house or while working she wore a tea-gown.

Evening-dress she scorned. It was immodest and degrading, she declared; designed to allure that weak creature, Man, and to pander to his vicious instincts. Possessed of a beautiful figure and irreproachable arms, Mrs. Hex Rashleigh never deigned to display these charms. She was true to her principles at the cost of vanity.

She was a staunch friend, too, to those for whom she cared; but to the idle, frivolous, sensuous members of her sex she presented a cold and ironical contempt that seemed to crush them into insignificance. These were not popular virtues, and bore their own fruit.

As she looked at herself now in that disputed mirror she thought of all this, and thought of it for the first time with some instinct of sex.

It occurred to her that she was a little sorry that men did not like her. And yet why should she be sorry, knowing her own worth, her sterling virtues, and equally conscious of the utter vileness and silliness and rapacity of the popular feminine type?

She looked at herself so long, absorbed in these speculations, that other women in the room noted it and exchanged glances of significance.

Even the Emancipated can be uncharitable—occasionally, and to see their leader studying her own reflection and idly tracing lines on a blotting-pad, filled them with wonder and amusement.

Suddenly she rose, put her letters together for the post, and thrust her MSS. into the drawer of her table and locked it.

The article for the *Sturm und Drang* was incomplete. For once

in her life she had found it impossible to bend her will to duty. Something had disturbed and distracted her. She felt restless, impatient, angry, and she had no reason for being so. That was the worst of it. It made her irrational, irresponsible, feminine—all that she most despised, and had denounced so often in lectures, articles, and books !

She spoke a few words to the other members of the Club, then left and called a hansom and drove home to dinner.

Mr. and Mrs. Hex Rashleigh, never interfered with each other's engagements, and rarely inquired into them.

It is an admirable system, and can be commended to all advocates of emancipation. It possesses only the trifling drawback that occasionally husband and wife may find themselves in the same place without previous intimation that such a meeting is probable.

To-night Mrs. Rashleigh attired herself in one of her apologies for

evening-dress—a tea-gown of rich oriental brocade—and took herself off to the “Circle,” as she had agreed with her friend, Mrs. Despard.

The “Circle” was a very remarkable combination of Talent, Mediocrity, and Celebrity-Worship. Originally, it had been instituted solely in favour of the first-named possession, but by degrees it had widened and spread into a very large ring indeed. All sorts of people clamoured for election or admission, and put forth strange pleas for that purpose.

The writing of a single pamphlet or a magazine article served as the claim of “authorship.” Publishers, again, were elected because the authors thought it would mean better terms for themselves, and that a general meeting-place for the discussion of Work might place such work on a more lucrative footing. Artists who could paint and not get “hung” came tripping on the heels of ar-

tists who got "hung" and could n't paint—at least this was what they said of one another.

Music had, of course, its own special claims. Besides, it entertained literature on occasions by giving gratuitous concerts to which nobody listened—unless a particular novelty was introduced such as a Whistling Lady, an Infant Phenomenon, or a Professor of Musical Glasses. When ordinary artists played or sang the Circle talked, as if to show how superior it was to such trivialities.

But the root and ground of the whole institution was Literature. The big authors with names and a banking account came here to sneer at or patronise the strugglers who had neither.

*Family Herald* and *Temple Bar* looked askance at one another; Burlington Street and Paternoster Row reckoned comparative profits. The writer of the last popular novel and the author of the last shilling shocker here met on neu-



tral grounds of fame, and held a court of special admirers and toadies. Altogether the Circle was a curious assemblage, and on guest nights, when it was supposed to entertain, it presented to the ordinary observer a spectacle that was at once unique and remarkable.

Always on these occasions the old members and the authenticated authors drew together into solid groups of severe animadversion, and asked one another, "How on earth did *he* get here?" or "How *she* became a member?" and shook their heads over a degenerate committee, and agreed the whole thing was going to the kennels, and that it had been very different in their time, and that they should give it up.

But season after season passed and they had not given it up, and were still critical, and still abusive. So one can only suppose they grumbled on Parliamentary principles, and with equal benefit to those concerned.

On these nights the Circle was favoured with guest tickets, and members could bring two or three special friends with them. This enabled each aspiring author to have his or her Court in attendance, and to move about the large roomy galleries with these devoted sycophants and reward them by pointing out—Names.

The Court dearly loved “Names.” It stared and gasped and gasped in wonder when the ownership of a name resolved itself into an ordinary human being with the usual complement of legs and arms. It was still more amazed to find that even Names committed few solecisms in the shape of attire. The Court had expected something different. It did not quite know *what* ; but still it was hardly prepared for dazzling shirt fronts, or satin-framed busts, and diamonds. It had held vague theories concerning unkempt hair, blue spectacles, dirty fingernails, and a Jellaby looseness of garmenting with a laxity in the

matter of hooks and eyes. It naturally took some time to get accustomed to the sight of satins and silks, gorgeous trains, and sparkling jewels.

When by some happy chance the Ideal *did* appear—correct even to the spectacles, towzled hair and slipshod petticoats—it usually proved to be a guest, or a struggler.

Female celebrity knew better than to hide its light under a bushel, or wear an ill-fitting and unbecoming gown. Dresses were an advertisement of profits, and publishers' liberality. Hence their splendour.

Into this queer jumble of Sex and Celebrity, Mrs. Hex Rashleigh swept proudly and alone, asserting by absence of escort another of the privileges of emancipation.

A group of the committee of the Circle stood in the position of hosts and hostesses, and she gave a general greeting to their effusive welcome as became one of their leading lights and show pieces.

"You have not honoured us once this season," gushed a hostess, seizing her hand and pressing it warmly. "We began to think you were going to desert us."

"I've been busy," said Mrs. Rashleigh in her usual curt way. She lifted a long-handled eye-glass and looked at the crowd round the refreshment tables. "I'll go and see the lions feed," she said, and passed on.

At every step she was met by a bow, a smile, an eager glance, a word of greeting. It was plain that Mrs. Hex was a very well-known person indeed. In fact it was popularly believed that she had been the founder of this remarkable institute. This, however, was not true. She had simply helped to organise it, and then retired in despair after a brief experience of what a committee is capable of.

Shaking herself free with some difficulty from the oppression of greetings, she drew her beautiful artistic draperies slowly through the

long tea-room. She was looking for Mrs. Despard.

Suddenly she stood stock-still as if turned to stone. Astonishment expressed itself without word or gesture.

She found herself confronted by two men, engaged in eager conversation. One was her acquaintance of that afternoon. The other—her own husband.

## IV.

### A BATTLE OF OPINIONS.

“**W**HO is that lady?” asked Blake Beverley, arresting his companion’s attention.

Mr. Hex Rashleigh peered with his short-sighted eyes and then smiled amusedly.

“That—is my wife.” He advanced a few steps and spoke to her. “I wish I had known you were coming. We could have driven down together,” he remarked. “Are you alone? . . . Shall I find you a seat?”

“Thanks—I’ll stay here,” she said, sinking into one of the velvet divans placed here and there. Then in a lower key, “Who is your friend?”

"Oh! young Beverley. Don't you know him? Shall I introduce him!"

"Yes; I met him this afternoon."

In another moment she had signified that the handsome Irishman might take a seat beside her. In two, she had intimated to her husband that he was *de trop*.

He was far too admirably drilled not to understand this hint, and he drifted off to another part of the galleries where these *réunions* took place.

"Odd, our meeting again like this," remarked the Irishman. "I had no idea who you were this afternoon. I've known your husband some time. Awfully clever, isn't he?"

"Clever?" Mrs. Rashleigh opened her handsome eyes in genuine astonishment. Then she remembered degrees of comparison. Perhaps Hex Rashleigh did seem clever to an Irishman who had n't a soul above Lever, and liked—recitations.

"I'm glad you think so," she

said. "He has n't given the world, or myself, that opinion."

"No? . . . Well, he's one of those quiet, retiring sort of fellows who see and do a great deal more than people suppose. But I forgot—you write books."

"Does that pre-suppose incapacity of judgment?" she asked sarcastically.

"Oh dear no! Only authors are such a dreamy, preoccupied race. They have so much to do with their imaginary characters that they overlook real ones—close at hand."

"The Modern Man," said Mrs. Rashleigh, incisively, "presents few traits of character that are worth writing about. He is an epitome of folly and selfishness, the outcome of a vicious past, the shame of a terrible present! If he ever has a future of any worth, he will owe it to the regenerating power of—Woman."

"Ah!" said Blake Beverley, his eyes sparkling with delight. "Now I know your vocation. You are one of the New Women. Aren't you?"



How jolly! I've longed to meet one. Do let's have it out. These grievances of your sex against ours. What's the reason of it all, and what do you all want?"

"We want," said Mrs. Rashleigh, "Men—not brutes; mental intelligence properly applied. We want equal freedom—equal rights. We want to abolish the slavish subjection of sex to sex, and stand alone—free—untrammelled—to make our own laws and live our own lives."

"And how do you propose to do that?" he asked.

"It will be a work of time, and it won't be easy," she answered. "But we *shall* do it—in the end. The battle has begun; it needs courage, industry, and devotion, and we have to fight against traitors on our own side, and tyrants on yours. Still . . . we shall win."

"I hope not," he said coolly. "I think you'd make an awful mess of things if you did—besides taking away half of our burdens and most of our fun!"

“Fun !” exclaimed Mrs. Rashleigh, indignantly. “Yes, that is your sole idea of life. Look at the present-day youth ! Can anything be more detestable ? Your very press scoures him almost daily. His morality is that of the monkey ; his tastes that of the “Coster,” on whom he seems to mould himself ; his life a living disgrace, and his death usually a scandal ! I’m not speaking of types, but of the Creature itself . . . the creature to whom we are condemned to act as mothers—the wretched result of past ages of man’s immorality and our defencelessness !”

“That’s very strong,” said the young Irishman. “It would n’t have occurred to me to look at it in that light. Ibsenish, is n’t it ?”

“It is the light of Common Sense and Truth,” flashed Mrs. Rashleigh, angrily.

“No doubt ; but still, I can’t see the remedy. You can never make the world of one pattern. There will always be good and bad, virtuous, and

vicious, rich and poor. Besides, sinners are rather interesting. What would the clergy do without them? And if we were all good, what would there be to talk about?"

"I am not jesting," said Mrs. Rashleigh. "I consider this is a serious and sacred subject."

"It is," he agreed—"very. And do you write on it, and lecture on it, and all that? No wonder you have n't had time to find out whether your husband is clever or not."

"We hold such different opinions," said Mrs. Rashleigh, coldly, "that I think we had better drop this discussion."

"With all my heart," he said eagerly. "Let me tell you how astonished I was to meet you here. Are you a member, or a guest?"

"The former. I was one of the prime movers in its formation."

"Were you really? Had it any special purpose?"

"It was intended as a meeting-place for workers. Art and literature and science were alone eligible

for membership. And look at it—now.”

“Well,” he said, laughing. “It’s a hotch-potch of all sorts, isn’t it? But that’s the way with most women’s clubs and societies. Somehow they never hang together, and generally develop into rowdyism.”

Mrs. Hex Rashleigh flushed angrily.

“I really do think,” she said, “that you are the very rudest young man——”

“But I’m only meeting you on your own grounds,” he said coolly. “Talking to you and treating you as I would a man. Isn’t that what you want?”

She bit her lip in pure feminine vexation. Twice to-day had this impertinent Hibernian succeeded in disturbing her usual serenity. No man had ever spoken to her as he did. Yet she could not say he was discourteous. Only—well, if a man is remarkably good-looking, and a woman feels an interest in him, it is

not quite pleasant to be treated as if she were only a schoolgirl or a fool.

"Are *you* a member?" she asked, waiving the question of manly courtesy.

"No; I've often been asked to join, but I can always get a guest ticket, so I've not bothered about it. Besides, I haven't too many guineas to throw away."

"Then you *do* something?" she exclaimed eagerly.

"I'm an actor. Are you interested in that line of business?"

"I'm interested in any profession that is intellectual or useful. . . . I don't seem to know your name though. And yet I rarely miss a first night."

"My first night has yet to 'come off' in London. I've only done the provinces as yet. It's a fine school though. I look upon it as the best friend and the best trainer of Ambitious Youth and aspiring Irvings."

"I thought you told me you were a singer this afternoon?"

"No ; I only said Madam Rosenberg had heard me sing."

"How did things go on there, by the way? Was the Bird of Prey rapacious?"

"How hard you are on your sex. She was very charming. She asked me to meet her here to-night."

"Indeed. Am I detaining you?"

"Not at all. I'd rather talk to you. You're more interesting."

Again that silly feminine flush coloured Mrs. Rashleigh's face. The blue eyes looked with warm admiration into the brown ones. She found herself wondering if they were truthful.

"How long have you known my husband?" she asked abruptly.

"How long? . . . Well, I met him first when I was on tour. We were doing 'The Rivals.' He took a fancy to my Captain Absolute. We knocked up an acquaintance, and since then we've not lost sight of each other."

"Oh! . . ." said Mrs. Rashleigh, "I should not have thought

you would have much in common. My husband takes little interest in theatrical matters."

Blake Beverley stared at her a moment. Then an odd expression came into his face. "I suppose," he said caustically, "the Modern Wife does not take much interest in the doings of the obsolete husband. He is of no importance to her. I wonder why she marries at all? Household affairs are beneath her notice. Maternity is a distasteful obligation. In her clamour for publicity she is oblivious of the wide area of private life where her influence and example might really be of use. Well, my remedy would be—'Give her her head, and let her prove for herself that she is making a vast mistake.' The majority of women are created *feminine* by nature. For God's sake leave them so. They will be far happier—and of far greater use."

"You use a man's selfish arguments," said Mrs. Rashleigh, conscious of a little prick of discomfort under her panoply of assurance :

“the arguments of generations of your sex who have considered it their duty to suppress and ill-use ours.”

“I think it is greatly your own fault if you have been ill-used,” he said. “I can answer for my countrymen, I know. They have far too high an opinion of women to play the part of brute, or tyrant. Of course I’m speaking of intelligent, decent-minded men. I hope they’re not as rare as you seem to imagine.”

“I fancy they are,” said his opponent, obstinately. “Judging from what I have heard and seen . . . the unfortunate victims of marriage and debauchery have certainly little to thank your sex for. Your one aim has been to keep women in ignorance and then abuse her for it.”

“That’s such a stale old cry. Any woman who had ability could always use it, if she was determined to learn. Even as far back as the days of Lady Jane Grey, she could do so without a man stopping her. The



truth is the majority of women have never possessed any great mental gifts. The exceptions have been small—but, I grant you, remarkable. It is not want of opportunity, but want of ability, that has kept women in the background. Even now, among all the Screamers and Clamourers, how rare it is to find a really clever or rational one. If a woman wants to do *real* good to her race, and earn the thanks of future generations, let her undertake the guidance of childhood, and teach her sons truthfulness, honour, and self-respect. She can do this better than any man. It's a pity she does n't try."

"She has tried, and broken her heart over failures, the result of example and of tyrannical laws. The rights of the father are alone respected. His faults are condoned, where her's are pilloried."

"Better so than the reverse side of the picture. Even law-makers have a high standard of Female morality."

“ We are drifting back into an old controversy. How is it you know so much about this matter ? ”

He laughed. “ Oh, I ’ve learnt a lot from your husband,” he said.

“ My husband ! ” Mrs. Rashleigh looked at him with polite incredulity. “ Do you really mean to say *he* talks on the subject ? ”

“ I should say he had very good cause to do so, considering he is one of the sufferers.”

She flushed to her temples. “ I have already had reason to remark on your manners, Mr. Beverley. I was not aware I had had the honour of being discussed in my relative positions of wife and housekeeper, by you and Mr. Rashleigh.”

“ You don’t like the idea,” he said, coolly. “ But, as I said before, if you claim equal rights with man you ’ll have to put up with very different treatment. He won’t make you pretty speeches or show you any particular attentions. You ’ll have to rough it like himself. I don’t suppose you ’ll like it, but—excuse my

saying so—you will have brought it on yourselves.”

“I fancy,” said Mrs. Rashleigh, wrathfully, “that we will be able to teach *him* what we expect—and to get it, too. . . . But there is my friend Mrs. Despard, looking at us. I promised to meet her here.”

“Then,” he said, rising at once, “I must not usurp your society any longer. I hope we’ll be none the worse friends because of this battle?”

The voice was so coaxing, the blue eyes so resistless, her wrath melted at once.

“Indeed, no,” she said warmly. “Come and see me whenever you like. On Sundays I’m always at home.”

“I shall remember that,” he said, and with a courteous bow he moved aside to make room for the pretty little Fashion Plate who had approached.

## V.

### THREE TYPES.

“YOUR friend of this afternoon, was n’t it, Marion ?” asked Mrs. Despard, fluttering her laces, flowers, and draperies in a perfumed cloud about the velvet divan.

“Yes. Odd we should meet again—so soon.”

“Not a case of Affinities, I hope ?” laughed the pretty Fashion Plate, giving a touch to the balloon-like expansion on either side her *corsage* which *la mode* calls “sleeves.”

Mrs. Rashleigh frowned. She never permitted jests on moral subjects.

“I find he knows my husband.” she said, “and that he is an actor.”

“An actor, and a friend of Mr.

Rashleigh's ? Why, I thought he was always buried in pamphlets and estimates of expenditure, and costs of armaments, and things of that sort ! ”

“ I suppose he has time to cultivate a stray friendship. Besides, he belongs to a club.”

“ Oh, a Savage, I suppose ? That would account for it.”

“ I really don't know, I never asked. But it could n't be the Savage. He has n't the qualifications.”

“ Well, look at *this*. Where do the qualifications come in ? I confess I don't see them.” She glanced around and rattled on. “ There's the Scandalton group ! Did n't I tell you they'd be here ? And observe the Anglo-Indian contingent. . . . That tall, stout woman, with the suspiciously black hair, is one of the most notorious scandal-mongers. Nothing escapes her. I'm always expecting she'll be brought to book for libel. That's a colonel's wife, that little fair woman. She's nearer sixty than forty, and look at her !

White satin and pearls. Is n't it touching. . . . Oh, do you see Mrs. Prancer? There, in daffodil satin. What a gown. She's had two husbands, and now she's like the Woman of Samaria. He whom she has, is *not* her husband. But he's going to be. So that's all right."

"My dear Tina, your tongue runs away with you," remonstrated Mrs. Rashleigh. "Surely, she would n't be here if . . . if that was true."

"Oh, yes, she could—and is, you see. It's not generally known, and she thinks it safe. Gracious! how do people speak to that dreadful woman, Zamoretti—though she has secured a husband at last! Did you ever see such a mountain of flesh? Looks as if she'd been *melted* into that gown and then let stand. Her shoulders and arms wouldn't disgrace a skirt-dancer's—limbs! We all say limbs, now, you know. It sounds so much more modest. Do you think ordinary cotton keeps those seams together?"

"What a rattle you are, Tina," said Mrs. Rashleigh, rebukingly.

"I know. I'm only shallow, and so I must make a noise somehow. Really this place gets funnier and funnier. It'll be a show to bring country cousins to, soon. What a crowd. Let's sit here and criticise."

"You mean scandalise, and that's not in my line."

"No, but it's in mine. So be dear, and let me enjoy myself. There's material here for three vol. novels, isn't there? Those two men are talking theosophy, and wondering what the society will do without 'H. P. B.' That little man is Mediocre, the artist. He and his wife are always here—Jewish, I fancy, judging from the nose. What is the sign manual of Israel? I can never be quite sure if it's eyes or nose, or a combination of both. Anyhow one can't mistake. . . . There's the little woman who recited this afternoon. What a pity some one does n't do her hair for her! . . . That's an Irishman with her—he is awful

fun, and sings rather well. Those three old maids are always here. Cotton-back velvets and *fakes*. . . . They come by omnibus and leave hats in the cloak room. . . . It's funny, is n't it? . . . Farce, Tragedy, Comedy, and Common Sense. You represent Common Sense, Marion."

"And you?"

"Oh, I'm Farce, I suppose. I never was sensible. I only look on and enjoy and frivol. After all, some one must frivol. We can't all be sensible."

"It's women like you, Tina, who are at once the despair and ruination of our movement."

"Yes, dear; I know. You've told me that before. I'm sorry—but how can I help it? As Topsy says, 'I 'spects I growed so.' There are always the bees and the butterflies, you know. One has to put up with them. They can't amalgamate; but each has their use. When I write my book I shall divide my characters into classes, and they can be comic



or dramatic, as they please. I believe in contrasts, as I told you to-day. The more *bizarre* the better. Fate has been awfully kind to me. I've never had any real trouble. . . . Even when poor dear Despard died, he did it so nicely—away from home, and all arrangements by telegram. I know it sounds heartless—but he was nearly eighty ; and if one believes one thing in the Bible, one must believe *all*. So he had rather *over-fulfilled* his regulation period. It is really nice to be rich and free, and do exactly what you please. Of course, if I was a grave, sensible person like you, I'd have a mission. But then I'm not sensible, and missions would only bore me. How do you like my gown ? ”

Mrs. Rashleigh's lip took an added curl of contempt.

“ It's ridiculous, and I should think uncomfortable ; but you look very pretty.”

“ How sweet of you to say so ! Yes . . . I confess I'd like half an inch more breathing space ;

but how would I look with a waist of twenty ; I'm not a grand, fine creature like you ! You big women will never understand what your small-built sisters have to undergo. You can wear anything, and we—well, very little. I don't mean in *covering*, . . . but in length, breadth, and general contour. Even high heels don't help us much. . . . And now, tell me, what's your new friend like ? Was it 'shop' ? ”

“ My 'shop,' if any. He favoured me with his opinions respecting the Modern Woman and her efforts at progress.”

Véloutine laughed.

“ How funny ! And you put on the gloves, of course. I wish I had been there as bottle-holder——”

“ My dear Tina, I can stand slander, but spare me slang ! ”

“ *Milles pardones* . . . I forgot. But you don't mean to say an actor talked Emancipation. . . . No wonder he's off to Mrs. Loosely. . . . Look at them.”

Mrs. Rashleigh did look. Indeed, her eyes had wandered already to that divan where a prominent bust, crossed legs, and Louis Quatorze shoes were points of interest to male passers-by. Mrs. Loosely was in great form. She wore black velvet cut *en-cœur* and *en* "spine." Her tousled hair was fresh from the touch-up of peroxide and the judicious wave of curling irons. Her small eyes were carefully darkened; her strident voice and jingling laughter struck sharply on the ear.

But she was quite happy. She flattered herself she had made a new conquest; and she dearly loved Hibernians. She had known several in her time, and they had carried out the legend of the Blarney Stone delightfully.

No one discerns feminine weakness so quickly as an Irishman. On the other hand, no one plays up to it so successfully.

Blake Beverley was allowing himself to be made love to in the most appreciative fashion, out of sheer

mischief and a little curiosity to see how far the modesty of the Modern Englishwoman allows her to go.

He had had a varied experience of it. Mrs. Loosely was inclined to offer him another instalment.

She was one of those women who are of no particular age after *thirty*. She had an insignificant husband, a daughter at a boarding-school, and a son in Germany. She also possessed ample means, and a desire towards youthful conquests. She generally annexed some young man and kept him in her train for a period, varying with his patience or her liberality.

While the "annexation" lasted the favourite was supposed to dance constant attendance on the lady ; to be her escort to every place, or, as she termed it, "show," where she elected to display her gowns and scandalise her hostess ; and hint illnatured things of every woman prettier or more popular than herself. Few people liked her—all distrusted her—and yet she was received and invited into the shadow of respec-

tability because she had not yet committed the glaring indiscretion of being "found out."

In that curious section of society which hovers on the confines of the Real Thing and the "Unknowable," Mrs. Loosely frisked and capered to her heart's content. Her husband was *complaisant*, and indeed really grateful sometimes to the callow idiot who thought it "life" to be playing amateur Lovelace, little fancying he was conferring an obligation as well as incurring a risk.

The last annexation had just developed "temper." He was sick of the business, and said so. He called it "rot," which was vulgar, if truthful. A month before it had been "ripping"—equally vulgar, but not so truthful. Mrs. Loosely was therefore in that frame of mind which enables wounded vanity to accept balm in the shape of new consolation.

It did not occur to her that the person she selected for the office of Consoler might have an objection to

fulfil that duty ; as a rule, she gave the hint—more or less broadly—and the annexation was soon effected.

Her conversation was somewhat different to that of Mrs. Rashleigh. It consisted in second-rate witticisms, sneers, and scandals, interlarded with descriptions of her gowns and laments over the dressmaker's failings.

"I like a man's work so much better," she was saying, "but they're so horribly expensive."

"Are they?" said Blake Beverley, vaguely. He was not yet initiated into the mysteries of "man" milliners and millinery. Neither was he aware that his predecessor had absolutely declined to pay a bill to one of these individuals, although he had introduced Mrs. Loosely to their favourable notice. She was still smarting under this trial, and tingling with a vivid remembrance of "home-truths" uttered in the row-royal that the bill had occasioned.

She wondered what young Beverley's income was. He looked such good style . . . Guards, or some-

thing of that sort. He had not told her his particular profession or calling—only complimented her on “perspicuity” when she had said, “I’m sure you’re in the army.”

“I saw you talking to that extraordinary creature, Mrs. Hex Rashleigh,” she remarked at length.

“Do you know her?” asked Blake Beverley.

“Oh! good gracious—no!” she cried, with animation. “I *could n’t*, you know. She’s too utterly dreadful! Goes about lecturing, and rails against men and society, and all that. One of the New Women, you know.”

“I am surprised she comes to a place like this,” said the Irishman.

“Why, what’s the matter with the place?” asked his companion, sharply. “The very best people come here, I can tell you. I’ve met quite the smart set at times.”

“No doubt; but Mrs. Rashleigh seems rather above that sort of thing.”

“Oh! the best people would n’t

take *her* up. She's impossible. Always slanging women for what they do, and men for what they don't. I pity her husband."

"Oh! he only shares the common lot of the modern husband. They'll soon die out, or—go to Turkey. Do you possess such an appendage?"

She laughed airily.

"Of course; you didn't fancy I was—unappropriated, did you?"

"It's difficult to know what women are, or are *not*, in the present day," he said coolly. "I'm always coming upon surprises."

"Well, I'm not hard to understand," she said, with a killing glance. "I've no vocation. I like to enjoy life and see others enjoy it. I get plenty of fun out of it, and I don't ask more."

"Ah! that's kind of you to interpret for me. The other night a woman told me one had to be 'not *too* bad, but just bad enough,' in order to be a success. I'm getting enlightened by degrees."



"As if men ever needed enlightenment," said Mrs. Loosely. "They take our measure very correctly, I'm sure."

"Literature seems well represented to-night," he said irrelevantly. "I've seen three of our leading novelists already."

"Oh, I hate literary people," she exclaimed pettishly, annoyed that the conversation should drift from personalities. "They're so horribly conceited and self-conscious, and expect you to remember all the books they've written. And their conversation is sure to be larded with quotations or references to things one has never heard of. They ought to keep to themselves, and not mix with society at all."

"I *have* heard," he said drily, "that they started this club with that intention, but society insisted on intruding. I came here to-night feeling quite an interloper."

"The idea! . . . I'm sure you would be welcome anywhere. When will you come and see *me*? Don't

say it is too far. A hansom will bring you in fifteen minutes."

"Not from where I live," he said gravely.

"Why? . . . Where is that?"

"Bloomsbury," he answered.

"Nonsense. . . . I thought you were in the Guards."

He laughed aloud. "No, I'm only 'Captain Absolute' of the 'Sheridan Co.,' . . . recently promoted to the London stage."

"An actor! . . . How delightful. But what a sad tease you are. You quite mystified me. Oh, I love your profession above all things! I've done a little in that line myself. I delight in getting up theatricals. You'll come and help me next time, won't you?"

"Delighted, if I can spare the time. But a struggling actor's life is not his own, you know. He is at the beck and call of managers, and they are apt to be exacting."

"Are you in any special show now?"

"No, only rehearsing a new piece.

Charley Wilton has taken a fancy to bring it out. I call it splendid, though the author is quite unknown. I expect it will take London by storm."

"What is the name of it?"

"A secret, like that of the author. He is modest and distrustful. If a woman had written anything half as good it would have been town talk by this time."

"And have you a good part?"

"Splendid. I feel grateful to the writer every time I rehearse."

"You might give me a hint who it is," insinuated Mrs. Loosely, with the look that she believed to be irresistible. "I promise to keep it a secret."

He laughed. "Don't you know a secret shared by a third person ceases to be a secret. . . . Women may not think so, but men *know* it."

"You are rather hard on our sex," said Mrs. Loosely, with a pout. "Surely *they* can't have taught you to distrust them. I fancy you could be irresistible—if you chose."

“No doubt,” he answered, with equanimity. “But, you see, women nowadays don’t care to be made love to. They prefer to smoke cigarettes and talk of ‘equality of the sexes.’” He half rose then. “If you will pardon my desertion I must rejoin the friend who brought me here. . . . He is looking so forlorn.”

“*He?*” inquired Mrs. Loosely, archly.

“Yes ; I mean Mr. Hex Rashleigh,” he said.

## VI.

### SOME REFLECTIONS, AND A RESULT.

MRS. HEX RASHLEIGH went home to her flat in a very dissatisfied frame of mind.

For the first time in her married life her husband had been presented to her as a being possessed of faculties and ideas, . . . even opinions. She saw him in the light of another man's eyes ; caught, as it were, a reflection of his individuality in the mirror of another man's attractions, and the vision had seriously discomposed her.

She had lived with him all these years, and yet she remembered now she really knew very little of him. He had only seemed to her a mild, inoffensive person who read a great

deal, and liked a good dinner, and preferred a theatre to any other form of entertainment.

Then, to-night, she had met him at the Circle, and found him on terms of intimate acquaintance with an actor. It was certainly odd.

True to her peculiar tenets, she had not interfered with him or his pursuits during the evening, nor informed him when she was going home.

Having wasted a couple of hours at the Circle, satirised the overdressed idlers who came out of curiosity, exchanged opinions with a few of the workers, and generally ignored the rest of the "crew," as she termed them, she had taken herself off in a very bad temper.

Once at home, she had put on her "working-gown," and shut herself into her own special den. But not even the soothing effect of a cigarette calmed her nerves, or enabled her to settle down to work. She sat, pen in hand, idly tracing lines on the paper before her. She had determined

upon completing a chapter of her new novel before going to bed, but somehow her thoughts would not flow in a given channel. Always—always they drifted off to that discussion on the burning question of the day: the question that she had taken up with hot enthusiasm, lashing right and left unsparing sarcasm, yet dimly conscious all the time that it was useless and one-sided.

Do what one would, women would always be their own worst enemies, and men knew it, and only laughed at the spurts of indignation which from time to time marked their crusade against the tyranny of custom.

“You think so much of imaginary characters that you overlook the real ones, close at hand.”

That was what he had said . . . that was what she found herself writing on the lines before her, until the bold, clear words seemed to live and sound in her ears, and bring up again that bright, laughing face

with its changeful expressions and its good-humoured mockery of herself.

He knew her, he had discussed her, and with *her own husband*.

It was a humiliation and surprising experience. Her husband ! Why, she had never condescended to enlighten him on her views. She had simply classed him in that catalogue of degraded beings for whom the name of "Man" said all that was necessary to say.

Her face grew hot now as she thought of it. That a stranger, a person whom she had only met twice, should be able to accuse her of neglect of her first duty—the duty of a wife, that he should be able to show her that this same husband was a complete stranger to her when he might have been an adviser and a friend ! . . .

With all Mrs. Rashleigh's eccentricity and enthusiasm she had a strong code of honour. She was passionless and cold by nature. Many women are that who cultivate



their brains at the expense of their sex. She had seen other women fall in love, and make fools of themselves, as the case might be, and she had only stood aloof, on a pinnacle of lofty contempt, and wondered at them.

Life seemed to her to mean so much more than just this—Love. Love—that modern-day sensualism had turned into a travesty of what was once pure and ennobling! Love—that only meant a *faux-pas* at which society smirked, and whose real degradation it condoned, so long as the offenders were discreet and rich. Love—that was the jargon of novelists who centred the real meaning of life in a wedding-ring! Love—that even the tepid masher laughed to scorn, and the Church had ceased to sanctify!

If Marion Rashleigh could have descended to any weakness it would have been a reverent adoration for genius . . . and a very noble constancy to a verified ideal. But her experience had taught her to

look down rather than "up," and men had only become to her what her impulsive words had termed them in her recent discussion.

It was a pity. For there was an element of nobility in her nature that was capable of great things, but now had been warped and strained in a wrong direction.

If Fate had been kind to her, if circumstances had only left her free in her calm, clear-sighted youth for a space of time, she might have made a wiser choice.

Decidedly Life is hard on women.

Between Servitude and Marriage they have little to choose, and youth is short and blind and impetuous. They are hustled into a choice, while man can wait and parley as he pleases. Then a day comes when the senses revolt—the mind leaps into action ; when Existence ripens, and demands a wider field for thought and feeling than the beaten track worn hollow by feet of patient slaves.

Marion Rashleigh could have

stood alone had she possessed means of subsistence—a profession, or employment. But she was penniless, hampered by family ties, handcuffed by prejudice, and she saw but one mode of escape.

She took it. Now she looked back, and scorned herself for her weakness.

“I should have worked . . . I ought to have been brave enough to face the world myself,” she thought. . . . “After all, what is the use of preaching to other women. I am no better. . . . I did the same thing they have done, and are doing, and will do, till the Day of Judgment solves this awful problem !”

Her cigarette had gone out unnoticed. The glass of iced water by her side was untasted. She felt weary and depressed. The zest had gone out of work. The spur of enthusiasm seemed blunted.

Impatiently she locked away her papers, and extinguished the lamp.

As she walked down the passage

she saw a light gleaming under the dining-room door. She opened it and looked in.

Mr. Hex Rashleigh was sitting by the table, his head bent over a heap of "typing," a pencil in his hand.

He wore a shabby old jacket, his hair was rough and crumpled as if in the frenzy of lapsed ideas or puzzling calculations.

Mrs. Rashleigh remembered Vé-loutine Despard's summary of his employment—"Armaments, or war estimates, or things!"

She smiled compassionately.

"I had no idea you worked so late," she said. "Do you know it is nearly two o'clock?"

He hustled away his papers in a shamefaced manner.

"Is it? . . . I had no idea. Do you want the lights put out?"

She looked at him, wondering why he seemed so confused.

Then she entered the room, shut the door, and drew a chair up opposite to him.

"No," she said, "I want to talk

to you for a few moments, if you can afford the time?"

He looked more astonished than she could have imagined possible, though no one knew better than herself how very unprecedented a request she had made.

"My time is always at your disposal, Marion," he said courteously. "You certainly put in but little claim to it."

The pile of typed MSS. was pushed aside, but he leant one arm on it. She could form no opinion as to its nature.

"I want to know," she said, in her usual downright manner, "how you made the acquaintance of that young actor. You seemed on such very friendly terms?"

"I met him at Scarborough last summer."

Mrs. Rashleigh cast her memory back—a memory of emancipated visits taken at her own sweet will, and giving her husband equal freedom of movement.

"Oh! . . ." she said, push-

ing the thick, soft hair up from her forehead in a perturbed and restless fashion. "At Scarborough. How does he act?"

"He is the most perfect Captain Absolute I ever saw. And his Tony Lumpkin is a creation to be remembered!"

"I did n't know," she said, "that you cared for dramatic art so much. You would never come to First Nights with me?"

He looked surprised.

"I fancy," he said, "you have very rarely asked me—or if so, only to pieces I did not care to see. The modern drama is often more revolting to one's taste than improving to one's morals."

"Bad taste is the distinguishing mark of the end of the century. One sees it in everything—in morals, manners, entertainments, books, art. . . . It drives one to despair. We can no longer plead Ignorance—and look at the use we have made of Knowledge."

"Perhaps," he said, "Ignorance is

only another name for baulked curiosity. Female ignorance, at least. Once gratified, it is content with the knowledge—of evil only.”

“That,” she said sarcastically, “is almost worthy of Oscar Wilde! When men think it worth their while to study women instead of scoffing at them, they may learn a great deal more than they imagine.”

“I am sure” he said, gently, “that no man really worth the name ever scoffs at Woman. He owes her too much. We can always remember our mothers.”

“Even if you despise your wives. True! But what a man accepts in his mother he has learnt in the age of dependence and compelled suppression. What he accepts from his wife is only what he allows her to offer.”

“I know,” he said, “that you hold very strong opinions on these matters. Of course I have read your books . . . although you have not seemed to desire it. If I might presume to offer any criticism——

"My dear Hesketh, don't fancy I am so thin-skinned as to fear *that*."

"Well, I should say they are marred by that peculiarly one-sided view Woman will persist in taking of these matters. You say men made the laws. True. But you cannot say that they made them without the best intentions and the strictest impartiality. Both sides have patient hearing, and equal justice. Woman in the present day are volcanic and irrational. The first taste of liberty has excited their enthusiasm to the exclusion of their judgment. They abuse without inquiry, and forfeit individual benefit for sake of general animadversion. 'All men are bad. All women victims.' That is the cry, I fancy. Even your voice has raised it, Marion."

She nodded. She was curious to hear what he really had to say upon a subject she had never yet deigned to discuss with him.

"Well," he said, "all thinking, sensible men are prepared to grant



that women have suffered a great deal, and have been excluded from many professions for which they are capable. But you must remember that this has been done more from motives of consideration than of injustice. We have considered your sexual infirmities a great deal more than you imagine. We have given you the life of Home, its rule and management. We have withheld from you nothing in the shape of artistic education for which you had any talent. The literary woman and the artist woman may not be the most suitable of wives, but no man would deny the advantages of their gifts. It is my humble opinion as an onlooker at all this strife, that, like every other important movement, the Time and the Hour had to come, and to be led up to by varying circumstances till you were ripe for action. You have sounded your battle note ; with you now rests the chance of victory or the shame of defeat. We will give you a hearing—indeed we will give you whatever

you desire if you go the right way about it ; but we don't want you to be *men*, and we will prevent it if we can."

She rose from her seat. Her face was very pale ; her eyes had a strange glow in their dark depth. She stretched out her hand involuntarily. "I am glad I have spoken to you," she said, "and I almost believe you are *right*."

## VII.

### MISGIVINGS.

FOR the rest of the week Mrs. Hex Rashleigh went about her various duties with stern resolution imprinted on her face, and a quaking heart.

There seemed to be a drag on the wheels of Progress. They neither raced as swiftly nor as smoothly as of yore. Her fellow members of the Reconstitution thought her decidedly "grumpy," though they were too much in awe of her to say so. If anything, she worked harder and read more than was her wont. She also talked less.

Mrs. Despard called in at the Club two consecutive afternoons to induce her to stray into the flowery paths

of society, as exemplified by the Row alive with a new Royalty, and a polo match at Hurlingham; but she refused attendance. She only said contemptuous things of society, and told Véloutine she looked like a French doll.

Mrs. Despard laughed. All women were occasionally out of temper. She recognised Mrs. Rashleigh's pettishness as a bond of weakness, and told her her liver was out of order.

Then she took herself and her perfumed flounces off to some other of her hundred and one dear friends, and "frivolled" to her heart's content.

She was very fond of Marion, but also she was a little bit afraid of her. It was only her passion for contrasts, her love of light and shade, that had occasioned her persistent cultivation of a woman so totally different to herself, and whose life gave so perpetual a rebuke to her own world. Mrs. Hex Rashleigh's books had made her celebrated, but she was

not popular. However, it is no bad plan to make people afraid of you, if you do not particularly wish for their liking. Good-nature is really a sign of weakness, and is invariably taken advantage of. The barometer of public feeling has a special weakness for fair weather—and smiles. Very few women, or men either, are content with limited appreciation. To be so, means unusual strength of mind and personal approbation. But Mrs. Hex Rashleigh had said, “What I choose to do, or think right to do, that I *shall* do.” She was strong-minded, and those about her soon felt her power.

That faculty of dominating others is a gift of nature. It cannot be acquired, or bought, or learnt. It is largely made up of personal magnetism, to which culture and observation contribute. It differs from fascination, being almost independent of beauty ; but it is of greater worth, and its influence more lasting.

Nearly every one knew Mrs. Hex

Rashleigh by name, but her circle of personal friends was limited. It was her own fault, or rather her own desire. She had no time to spare for cultivating inanities, and though she put up with Mrs. Despard, and was indeed fond of her in a pitying, protective fashion, she drew the line at Mrs. Despard's friends. Perhaps this was wise, for their name was Legion, and their morals very *fin de siècle* indeed. They were people who lived for enjoyment . . . to whom Right and Wrong meant only what was desirable or what was *not*. If a temptation came in their way they never dreamt of resistance. Such resistance as is disturbing and makes one uncomfortable. They yielded, and then—analysed the peculiarities of human nature and the complex working of temperment. That made their peccadilloes so interesting that they became almost virtues.

To say that a woman of Mrs. Hex Rashleigh's type despised this class of moralisers is to say very little. She loathed them, and she

never spared them in her writings or her lectures.

A great passion, however unfortunate, has some element of nobility and self-sacrifice in it. It is nature at its highest state of exaltation speaking through the heart to the soul; but the countless intrigues and flirtations with which society women soil their lives are at once the despair and disgrace of the world they rule. The woman who can stand aloof and let men woo her for her own worth is the only woman who can claim his respect, and if he loves her without such reverence his passion is only effervescent.

. . . . .

When Sunday came round, Mrs. Hex Rashleigh was conscious for the first time in her life that a "day" might possess an element of interest apart from mere callers.

In plain words, she hoped for one special visitor, and felt a thrill of genuine pleasure when he came.

This was odd, considering that the

room held several quite learned and celebrated people, including a Swedish dramatist and an American female lecturer, who had come over armed with special letters of introduction from the Emancipated Sisterhood at Chicago.

Perhaps Mrs. Hex Rashleigh was a little tired of the lecturer. She was so very loud, and she had such a marvellous flow of speech. In any case, she handed her over to the Swede, and drew Blake Beverley away from their noisy neighbourhood to a cosy corner where stood two basket-chairs and a tea-table.

"You did remember, then?" she said, handing him a cup of tea, and signifying that he might occupy the other chair.

"Of course. You surely did not fancy that I should forego such a pleasure?"

She looked at him keenly. He was handsomer than ever, she thought.

"That sounds very conventional, but you owe it to your nationality.



By the way, how is it that you have so completely dropped the brogue with which you favoured me for the first ten minutes of our acquaintance?"

He coloured slightly. "I'm afraid," he said, "I was rather rude to you that afternoon. I only put it on for fun."

"I thought so. I wondered why you thought it necessary."

Her voice was rather languid, and her face paler than he had ever seen it. For a moment he looked at her with the interest of a man for a woman—not the half-critical animosity she had hitherto aroused.

"I must ask for forgiveness on the plea of that very nationality," he said, with genuine regret in his voice. "We so often let impulse run away with discretion. But I might have known you were different to most women."

"I wonder if that is an advantage, or a reproach," she said, with a faint smile.

"An advantage, I should say.

May I remark that your rooms are charming. What a lovely idea that is."

"You mean those shelves running round the room. Yes, I had that done for convenience, and the result is rather good. I like, wherever I am, to stretch out my hand and have a book beside me. So I had those shelves made, and gradually they have lent themselves to many uses."

"You are devoted to books, I suppose?"

"Indeed, yes. I often say I could do without people and be very content, but I can't *live* without books."

"Rough on the people, though. But I should fancy you were very critical. Since I last saw you I have been reading *Gillian*. It is wonderfully clever."

"Why don't you say 'But'—? A woman's work is always qualified by a man, just as a woman's looks are always qualified by a woman."

He laughed. "Well, to be candid, I felt inclined to say 'but.' I thought you were hard on that poor woman

Margot. You did not make allowance for hereditary instincts, and for vicious surroundings."

"Perhaps not. I often let my own feelings carry me too far either for or against a case. I should remember my favourite Hegel—'*Nature is for man only the starting point which he must transform to something better.*'"

"That 's hardly logical, is it? How can one transform a starting point into anything else? It must continue to be the beginning."

"He *means* nature, of course. I was translating."

"Oh! those German metaphysicians would split a hair and then argue about its component parts. Don't you think it's a pity to spoil this jolly life with all this analysing and prying into what it means, or why it is?"

"A pity? . . . Oh! no. The pity is not to try and understand it, and make it better worth living."

"I find it very well worth living," he said, putting down his cup.

"But you have an object—a

career. That gives it interest. An existence without interest is impossible. It tends to moral destruction. Life is only stimulating when one can do something—not passively accept what other people have done.”

“Undoubtedly that is so. But few can do what they wish. Life is limited by circumstances, which in nine cases out of every ten are too strong to resist, or to break down.”

“Not if one has courage and determination. Difficulties, like temptations, exist to be overcome.”

“By the strong. But confess the majority of men are not strong. They need excuse more than condemnation—a helping hand, not a rod of chastisement.”

She was silent. It seemed strange to have to confess she was wrong on so many points—points which, up to a week before, she would have upheld to the death. She found herself wondering at the change, as well as disturbed by it. And it was all the outcome of one chance afternoon spent in unpalatable society—an

afternoon which she had declared "wasted."

"I hope my plain-speaking has n't offended you?" he said at last, surprised by her long silence.

She lifted her head, and the big, honest brown eyes looked at him with something of distress and appeal.

"Oh! no. Only there are times when the failure of effort and the utter misapprehension with which it is met, makes one rather hopeless."

"Still, effort is better than inanity. It is the symbol of strength. People are weak; but they learn to love what helps them. You must have done a good deal in that way."

"The sort of help that is like the stone of Sisyphus!" she said, with sudden bitterness—"rolling back as fast as one moves it forward."

"Oh, I don't think so! Your husband says you have been of incalculable benefit to him, as well as to the mission you have taken up. By the way, where is he? . . . I wanted to talk to him about——"

He stopped abruptly. He remembered a caution he had received. She noted the hesitation, and wondered.

"He never comes in on my day," she said coldly. "I don't think his nature is a sociable one."

"If you saw him at the club!" exclaimed Blake Beverley.

"You see, I haven't that privilege. I don't even know what club he goes to."

"I should ask him, if I were you," said the young Irishman, laughing. "It would surprise you to hear—Ah! is n't that your friend Mrs. Despard? I've so often wanted to know her."

He rose as the little, gay, exquisitely dressed figure advanced towards the table.

Mrs. Hex Rashleigh rose too.

Of course she must introduce them. The thing was unavoidable, and Tina was such a desperate flirt—and so pretty!

## VIII.

AN "ARTICLE" DEFINITE AND DEFINED.

BY five o'clock Mrs. Hex Rashleigh's rooms were crowded.

She herself moved from group to group, encouraging or entering into a discussion—always graceful, always ready with some trenchant criticism or *à propos* remark.

A pair of blue eyes watched her with keen interest.

It was quite possible for Blake Beverley to talk to one woman and observe another.

A woman of Mrs. Despard's type, too, did most of the talking herself, and laid no great claim upon her entertainer, if he was good-looking.

Blake Beverley found himself wondering how a woman like Marion Rashleigh could make a friend of such a frivolous little society doll as Tina Despard. Yet, in their different way, both women were interesting—types of different worlds where each played a part, and had a vocation.

People who go in for violent reform rarely pause to think how excessively bored they would be if every one thought, spoke, and acted on exactly the same lines.

It is the very diversity of opinions and the very variation of actions that give life any sensation or interest. A dead level must be dull, even if the levellers have had the best motives in rolling and smoothing down all obstructions.

Blake Beverley enjoyed “types” immensely. He had been favoured with three of the most varied and opposite lately in the persons of Marion Rashleigh, Laura Loosely, and Véloutine Despard.

The first was decidedly the most



interesting—the last the most amusing.

Mrs. Loosely he had “placed” in his own mind as a woman with the most elastic code of morality—a woman who would never permit modesty to stand in the way of any “fancy,” and whose dresses and whose passions made up the sum of life’s interests.

A dangerous woman—a woman to be avoided—a woman whom no man could help distrusting and despising even while she flattered his vanity and played Delilah to his lower instincts.

Even as he sat now in this room, with its quiet and homelike grace, its perfect tones of colour, its absence of all the fripperies and follies of modern drawing-room decorations, he remembered the note in his coat-pocket requesting, almost commanding, his presence, at this same hour, in a very different place.

The very scent of it seemed to desecrate this room of Marion Rashleigh’s—its noble proportions so care-

fully utilised, its sense of studious peace, its artistic colouring and carefully chosen draperies. The instincts of women speak out very strongly in their homes. It should never be difficult to judge them from exclusively *personal* surroundings.

Blake Beverley observed and noted, and from time to time his ear listened for that clear, full-toned voice, with its modulated expression and its well-chosen words.

From time to time, too, he found himself noting the grand lines of that splendid figure in its robe of dull velvet and quaint oxidised girdle. How well she looked in this style of dress, and how wise she was to adopt and keep to it in an age when Fashion had vulgarised everything artistic, and a woman's shoulders seem the only portion of her frame worthy to command notice !

Meanwhile Tina Despard chattered like a pert parrot, scandalising every one she knew, and telling risky little stories with the most babyish innocence.

But he noticed that she always spoke affectionately, almost reverently, of Marion Rashleigh.

"She is the one woman I have ever known who has not a bit of the 'cat' in her," she chirped. "We most of us have it, you know, more or less. I've never discovered any about her. If anything, she is too good. . . . She makes all other women seem small and foolish and trivial. They abuse her dreadfully; I never do. I have the most intense appreciation of her. I have always considered it an honour to be her friend."

"I can quite understand that," said Blake Beverley, with a feeble attempt to stem the torrent of chatter.

"It's a pity, though, she goes in for this Emancipation business. . . . Women won't be made different, and that's the truth. Half of us are bound to be foolish, and to like dress and society, and the world as it is. We don't want it altered. We know we're bad by comparison, but we

rather like it. 'There's more fun out of the naughty side of life than the good. Marion is built on grand lines. She can't help being good, but she's an exceptional person. There's a . . . what on earth's the word?—a preponderance about her. She's terribly in earnest, and she has done a lot of really useful work. I can only help her with money. I always considered money the most important thing in the world till I knew her. Now I've learnt that it's Work . . . with a capital W, you know. I call this the twenty-third letter age. All the important things begin with W. Have you noticed? Women—Working-man—Wages—Work. I made out a heap of others, but I've forgotten them. I hate work myself. I always did. That's why I married money. I know it sounds very dreadful, but it's perfectly true. After all, one has to marry something, has n't one?"

"Usually a man; but of course he's very insignificant nowadays."

"Only to people like Marion," she said, with a pretty glance that was flattery itself. "Do you know I used to be awfully afraid of her once."

"I can quite believe it. What destroyed that wholesome awe?"

"I suppose it was wholesome. Sounds like wholemeal bread and Chipp's cocoa, and all those nutritious and unpalatable things! Oh, it's not destroyed. She can be very terrible sometimes, but she's good to me, and makes excuses. I do my little best to please her, and she accepts. Sometimes I fancy she finds me refreshing after the Heavy Contingent. *The* women, you know. I'm only *a* woman, an indefinite creature in the scale of creation. You note the difference?"

"I do," he said, laughing despite himself. "But you might particularise it."

"Well, *the* woman is stern, stolid, denunciatory. She never flirts—she never frivols. She has a mission, and she lets you know it. She wants

to reform everything, to get us into colleges and universities and professions. She invents hideous garments and calls them Rational. She makes athletic exercises her sole excuse for recreation. She eats and drinks on hygienic principles. She wears Jaeger clothing, and takes cold baths in the winter. She has views, and airs them everywhere, at home and abroad. She is downright and dominant. . . . I think that's about all. Now for the other side, . . . indefinite but not indefinable. She's only subtle. It may n't sound much, but it means a lot. It means she'll get all *she* wants without any trouble, while the other woman will have a world of trouble and—never get it ! ”

She stopped, probably from want of breath—certainly not for want of words.

“ I ’ll tell you,” she went on, presently, “ another point on which we differ. ‘ *The woman* ’ is not emotional. No one, I believe, has ever seen her cry. Now the insig-

nificant ones are always in floods at the least thing. It's childish, but we can't help it. The other seems to have corked up her tear-bottle with her emotions. She is always strong, and always hard. No one is really so hard as an unemotional woman. On the other hand, no man is so strong. If she throws feeling overboard she can do anything. That's where you ought to come in—as a sex I mean. Man alone could teach her to feel, and make her unfreeze herself. That's one of my own coinage. Don't you think we ought to invent new words now and then?"

Blake Beverley felt as if his brain was going. He rose abruptly.

"I've been here an unconscionable time," he exclaimed. "And for a first visit!"

"Oh, you need n't mind points of etiquette here," said Mrs. Despard. "Marion would never notice. She's too far above such trivialities. Do you know she never *calls* on people—is n't it funny? Ah! there she is.

. . . Marion, your ears ought to be on fire. We've been discussing you upside down."

Blake Beverley held out his hand.

"I must really be going," he said. "I came for ten minutes and I've stayed an hour."

Mrs. Despard had also risen.

"There's no chance of a word with you, Marion, in this crowd. So I'll take myself off too. By-bye, dear."

Marion Rashleigh shook hands with both in her usual composed, queenly fashion. Certainly it looked very like a flirtation. Probably Tina had offered him a seat in her victoria. Whenever she came upon a particularly nice man she always found that they were going in the same direction, and was good-natured about that seat.

Mrs. Hex Rashleigh was wrong, however, in this instance.

As they left the room and moved down the passage a door was quietly opened.

"Ah, Beverley, I thought I heard



your voice," said Mr. Hex Rashleigh. "Can you give me a few minutes in my study?"

He retreated in a sort of Jack-in-the-box fashion. Mrs. Despard laughed. But she had lost her escort for that afternoon.

## IX.

### A WHOLESOME DESPAIR.

“**M**Y dear boy, it will never do. . . . I’m sure it will never do !” exclaimed Mr. Hex Rashleigh, despondently.

He was sitting in a small, close room, the smallest and worst room in the flat. It was dark and ill-lighted. It smelt of smoke and was littered over with books and papers. The owner of it was seated at a shabby, old-fashioned writing-table, a thing of drawers and pigeon-holes and ink splashes. His hair was ruffled, his brow drawn and lined, his eyes anxious.

He had the look of the author in that frame of mind best described as reactionary. It is a frame we all

know—the result of self-confidence, of self-appreciation, of a little pleasant content which a lurking Demon called “Dissatisfaction” is always at hand to overthrow.

The Demon had made an afternoon call on Mr. Hex Rashleigh. He had ingeniously disparaged his best lines, mocked at his witticisms, and suggested his pathos was forced.

The Demon, in fact, had had a good time of it, and the poor victim a bad one. He needed sympathy. Blake Beverley saw that at a glance and proceeded to offer all the consolation he could command.

“She would despise me so utterly if I failed,” lamented the poor man. “It’s extraordinary how hard a clever woman is on a failure. . . . I really feel inclined to draw back even now.”

“Good heavens, man! Don’t be such a fool!” exclaimed the Irishman, impetuously. “Why, you’ve got a chance that other fellows would give their right hand almost to get! The very fact of the play being

accepted proves it's good stuff. Though Wilton likes novelty, he won't take up a piece on that ground alone. Besides, you forget me. This is to be my chance also."

"You might find another part easily, and much better suited to you."

"I might, but I don't intend to look for it. I'm quite content with Captain O'Connor. Shall I run through a bit to give you confidence in yourself once more?"

"Oh, if you would! I do feel a gleam of hope when you're on. It's the actress I fear. She does n't seem to grasp the part."

"You must n't judge her till the last rehearsal. She is always like that. Walks through the thing as if she didn't care a hang how it went. Then comes out in a burst. We have n't a finer dramatic actress on the stage now. You need have no fear about her. Now listen. . . . My cue, and then read Lady Warrender's part."

For the next twenty minutes the

little study resounded with brilliant repartee, trenchant arguments, sparkling witticisms. Blake Beverley was a rollicking Irish soldier, patriot to the core, gentleman to the backbone, . . . a character that could not fail to charm, and one that, to use his own expression, fitted him like a glove.

The Demon was fairly ousted now. The merry thrusts, the rapid give-and-take of the dialogue, the involuntary laughter even from the two most concerned in criticism, soon banished that obnoxious intruder.

Mr. Hex Rashleigh put down his copy and wrung the young actor's hands with enthusiasm.

"You're simply perfect. Oh, if Lady Warrender were half as good!"

"My dear fellow, it's lucky she doesn't hear you. She'd never forgive you. I assure you again and again you need have no fear. Mind, there are still three weeks before the date. Wonders will be done in that time. Now do be rational and don't worry your head about it.

You 're in safe hands, and I promise that Mrs. Rashleigh will be more than proud of you, as you seem to care for her opinion above everything else."

"I do, my boy. I've often thought she regrets our marriage. She's so . . . so superior to me in every way, and she has just that way of making one feel a fool. . . . I can't describe *how*—but it's effectual. If this affair is a failure I tell you plainly I'll fly the country. I could n't face her."

Again Blake Beverley laughed. "What! fly before a woman! You put me on my mettle for both our sakes. I'll pull your play through against all odds now. And believe me, an Irishman does n't make *that* vow for nothing!"

Mr. Hex Rashleigh ran his long, slender fingers through his hair once more—a trick of his when perturbed or excited. It was pleasant to be assured of success. Still——

"You're sure you have n't given a hint, Beverley?" he said presently.

"On my honour—no. Did n't I promise? The only question now is, will she be present?"

"Sometimes I hope not," said the nervous author. "Better to hear than to see if it turns out wrong."

"It's not going to turn out wrong—for goodness sake don't take up that idea. The best plan is to send her a box. She's fond of 'First Nights,' and this will be well puffed beforehand. What a grand woman she is!" he added, after a pause.

"Yes," agreed Mr. Rashleigh. "A fine nature, but warped. If only she would let this foolish business of teaching men and women their relative duties alone, she would be wiser and happier too. It's a bit ridiculous after all to tell us that we are to go in leading strings to women; that we have mismanaged the whole social system all these ages, and that *now* we are discovered to be impostures and ignoramuses with nothing to qualify us for the task."

"These new writers have much to answer for," said Beverley. "A

woman has an unfortunate experience, and forthwith she rushes into print and abuses the whole sex as vicious. She draws her characters solely on one line—the line of an immoral and debased past—and its results on womanhood and issue. But all men don't live immoral and debased lives. Those who do, bear the stamp very plainly, and it's a woman's own fault if she marries them. Besides, these Denouncers lose sight of one point. Man at a very early age has two powerful foes to combat—his own nature and the tempting of women. In almost every case I have heard of, it is she who first corrupts Youth, and sets him spinning along the downward path. The boy of seventeen is a baby of bashfulness in comparison with the girl of that age. If we took the census of the 'First Fall' it would be his, at her tempting, not *hers* at his."

Mr. Rashleigh lit his pipe and began to smoke meditatively.

"I suppose so. It's a puzzle al-



together. . . . I must say our colleges and universities don't rank female morality very highly. I suppose, too, they judge from experience."

"I don't believe Youth is vicious," persisted Beverley. "It is only inquisitive, and it rarely gets its curiosity satisfied the right way. It needs a strong moral nature to keep a man virtuous. A woman has the help of her own instincts and surroundings."

"Exactly. . . . They can hardly go wrong if they wish. We can hardly help erring even if we try."

"No man worth the name ever cares to stoop too low. He also has self-respect, though a woman may n't believe it. I'm not going to praise myself, but I assure you, Rashleigh, if you only knew how I've been pestered and run after by women, even women of society and repute, you'd say *they* had n't much to boast of."

"And we don't give them away, as they do us," said Mr. Rashleigh, sadly. "With all a woman's boasting a man's sense of honour is far stronger than hers."

"It need be," said Blake Beverley, with a short, hard laugh. "They talk of what they suffer at our hands. Good Lord! how many a man has to lay the blame of ruined health, honour, life, love, happiness, at their door! Take even marriage. What man can really tell if a woman accepts him because she *cares*, or only because she wants to marry some one? It is sickening to read the list of 'marriages arranged' in Society papers. Talk about the French *mariages de convenances*! What better are ours? Only the English are such d——d hypocrites! Look at our Divorce Court. The woman will rarely show up with *one* co-respondent, and yet she abuses us for immorality. If we have strayed before marriage, by Jove! *she* makes up for it after!"

"You speak as bitterly as if—as if your experience had not been altogether pleasant."

"What man's is—with a profession like mine? I assure you when Mrs. Rashleigh presented woman to

me from *her* point of view I almost laughed in her face. Is it possible she believes all she says?"

"I hardly know. You see she rarely discusses these matters with me."

"You should insist upon it. After all you are her husband, and you have a right to give your opinion of women just as much as she has of men."

He paced the room, and waxed indignant as he pursued the subject.

"Who so merciless to her own sex? Who rejects the servant without a character—the poor governess who has no reference but misfortune, though she knows such refusal may ruin a fellow sister's life? Who refuses aid to starving virtue if the applicant is more beautiful than the moralist? Who keeps the shop-girl on her feet for weary hours, and the sempstress at her needle from dawn till midnight to gratify her vanity. Who has the dumb brutes shot, the harmless birds snared, that she may deck herself with furs and

feathers? Who neglects the little babe at the call of Fashion, and relegates a mother's rights to strangers? Who is an epitome of selfishness when strong, and folly when weak? Woman!"

"I've said things to that effect *here*," observed Mr. Rashleigh, smiling.

He pointed to the MSS. of the play. Their eyes met. The old spark of mischief crept into those of the young Irishman.

"True, I forgot. Yes, there are a few sledge-hammer blows there. I always think the stage is our real Popular Educator. People will go to a theatre who would never read a book, and the stage gives *life* to a speech when the printed page would only seem dull. I can't understand," continued Blake Beverley, "why you and Mrs. Rashleigh have never worked together. You should assimilate perfectly. She has fine dramatic instincts too."

"She would consider it waste of time," said the unimportant hus-

band. "And I daresay she would be right," he added, with a faint sigh.

Blake Beverley rose.

"I must go," he said ; "I promised to dine at Wilton's. I wish you were coming. All your 'play' will be there."

"Then *I'm* best out of it," he said, with a nervous laugh.

"Ah, now, don't be talking like that," said Blake Beverley, with a touch of "the brogue" and a warm shake of the hand. "Haven't I promised you success? And though I did once kiss the Blarney Stone, shure it's meself has the truthful tongue and the 'cute eye for a prophecy. I never made a failure in *that* line yet."

## X.

### AND YET ANOTHER "TYPE."

MRS. LOOSELY was "at Home." Whenever she specially desired a new "annexation," or had successfully accomplished one, she celebrated it in this fashion.

She called all her friends and neighbours around her and put up the new conquest for exhibition. It was always a platonic exhibition. No one could say a word against it—at first. She was just sufficiently in awe of Mrs. Grundy to toady her a little, and set up occasional domestic scenery on her stage of morality. So she entertained her lavishly on occasion, with Mr. Loosely by her side, and the "annexation" as a discreet background.

He could only be distinguished by the initiated, or the scandal-mongers, who always would be nasty and refused to believe in platonics even at the instigation of a supper.

Mrs. Loosely gave very good suppers, and her champagne didn't absolutely require medical attendance next morning. Mr. Loosely, who did something in the bill-discounting line, was supposed to get it at sales, or take it as part payment of usurious interest.

In any case it was always there, and any one could see the gold foil, even if the brand was unknown in the market.

So Mrs. Loosely was "at Home" this June night, and had sent out cards three weeks before, stating the fact. Northerton was not so overburdened with engagements that it needed very long notice. Three weeks was considered long enough. At least Mrs. Loosely and Mrs. Colonel Sassepool never gave more, and they represented the *haut ton* of the district, and were supposed to live on

the lines of the *World*, and *Truth*, and the *Morning Post*.

So the drums beat and the trumpets sounded, and Northerton donned its best gowns, and the Anglo-Indian contingent told each other they were "*pucca*," or something to that effect, and brought out wonderful stores of beetle trimming and embroidery, and jewels that had always been presents from rajahs, and scarfs and laces that represented "loot," and smelt of sandal or camphor wood. They always crowded together and talked very fast, as if to compensate for years in Calcutta or Bombay, where speech had only been known as a necessity, and never developed into recreation, except in very cold weather at hill stations.

They said doubtless Mrs. Loosely considered herself a "*burra mem-sahib*," and then gave that little fat chuckle which distinguishes the Anglo-Indian, and is their sole idea of mirthful expansion. Then they compared the rooms and the entertainment generally with *their* own



rooms and *their* own entertainments in Calcutta—of course to their own advantage—and shook their heads regretfully over past glories when the rupee meant its currency value and they had each had their own *kitmutgar* to attend to their wants when they went to a dinner party.

Mrs. Loosely hated the Anglo-Indian contingent, but she was obliged to ask it to her parties because it was impossible to avoid knowing it. Besides, it was mostly rich, and gave good dinners!

Mrs. Loosely always professed to be independent of the *vox populi*. The dread words, "they say," had no fears for her. But all the same she had a wholesome awe of Mrs. Grundy, who, in her way, represents that voice, and knowing how she secretly outraged that good lady's code of morals she openly professed the greatest regard for her.

A few choice spirits, with the same instincts and the same code of morality as herself, understood her reasons and agreed with them. .. If they

laughed, it was behind her back, and she returned the compliment.

“Who is it, dear? . . .” the choice spirits asked each other to-night.

They had failed to recognise the “annexation” by the usual signs. He was not hovering in the neighbourhood of Mrs. Loosely’s gorgeous train, which combined primrose satin and real *duchesse* lace, and had cost more money than she liked to remember, or intended to pay. Neither was he discoverable in judiciously screened corners of stairways and balconies, detaining her for a whisper or receiving a command. It was very odd and very unusual, but they tried in vain to “place” him.

Then a particularly dear friend observed that there was an anxious look in Mrs. Loosely’s eye, a slight frown on her brow as the rooms filled and names were announced and the hour grew late.

There was the usual music—more or less bad. Mrs. Loosely sang in her shrill, tuneless soprano that she was “Waiting,” at which the choice

spirits cackled and said "they thought as much." The little baby-faced woman in a grey gown to match her curls, recited as she was always expected to do, one of her pathetic little pieces about precocious children who die and go to angels and gardens of eternal bloom, and every one said it was "really charming," and what a dear, clever little thing she was, and how could she remember so many lovely pieces !

Then a burly man thundered out the "Charge of the Light Brigade," and a dapper little military gentleman, who was, in fact, Colonel Sassepool, sang an Irish song, which was much applauded and badly accompanied.

Miss Eugenia Agra, a professional lady who came without terms, and was longing for supper, played a noisy composition largely composed of octaves.

Then every one talked, and Mrs. Loosely got near the door and was suddenly seen to start, and, yes, absolutely to blush. The choice

spirits nodded to one another and telegraphed, "He has come!" and then looked unconscious and only saw the door through lowered eyelids. They knew feminine ways, and even determined not to give Mrs. Loosely the satisfaction of even perceiving the new arrival was young, good-looking, and excellent style.

But nothing escaped them. Not the confidential whisper, the upturned glance, the wave of the fan, the flutter of a flower-petal on her *corsage*, which was as *décolletée* as a Greuze picture, and left little to the imagination, and less to the material. They knew every trick and its worth. They had imitated a good many themselves, but never, so they declared in confidence, quite so unblushingly and boldly as Mrs. Loosely proved herself capable of doing.

Meanwhile, under cover of the Broadwood's thunder, Mrs. Loosely held arch and seductive converse.

"So good of you to come, . . . and as nice to hit it off just when all the tiresome 'receiving' business is

over," she said. "I have n't had a moment to myself, but now I can afford a little treat, and give *you* ten minutes. Let us sit out here. It is cooler than the room."

"Out here" was a little corner of the landing, dimly lit, delightfully cushioned, and calculated not to betray *toilette* secrets. Mrs. Loosely had tested its convenience often.

He took the seat. He could not very well help doing so, and met a glance of bold femininity that seemed to suggest many possibilities.

"I 'm afraid I 'm very late," he said, rather stupidly. "But I had a rehearsal, and the hansom certainly did n't attempt the distance in the fifteen minutes you promised."

She felt an indefinable coldness in the air, the same inscrutable something that had already warned her that Blake Beverley was not inflammable, though an Irishman, and less ready to meet a woman half-way than she had credited any man with being.

"Perhaps," she said, giving him

an available loophole, "the way *seemed* longer than it really is. You have never been here before?"

"No, but University Gardens is further. Have you any of our mutual friends here to-night?"

"Do you mean the Rashleigh set? Certainly not. We don't hit it off. . . . I like women to *be* women. Soft and pleasing, and all that, you know. . . . I'm not a bit strong-minded—myself."

Another glance. But he only thought how small her eyes were, and how obviously darkened, and wished she would not sit quite so close to him. He surveyed the tips of his patent leather shoes, and wondered which is the bigger fool—the man who won't see what a woman is driving at, or the man who sees it and accepts—consequences. He was keen-sighted, but not at all inclined for consequences. Mrs. Loosely had fairly pestered him into coming to her party, and he had yielded, but he was annoyed with himself for doing so now.

"Oh," he said, at last, "I did n't mean Mrs. Hex Rashleigh. I never expected to find *her* here. I meant the people we discussed at Madame Rosenberg's the first time I met you."

"Oh, no! I go to Jerusalem, but I don't invite it to me. The worst of giving a party is the 'weeding out' process. It's impossible to ask every one you know, and those you don't ask get offended."

"Is that professional?" he asked, as a crash of chords thundered from the adjoining room.

"The performer? Yes. Do you care about music?"

"If it's good. By the way, did n't you tell me you sang?"

"I *have* sung to-night. I can't give myself away too often."

She spoke as if her singing had been the thing of the evening. Probably she considered it so. She affected to know a great deal about music, and had once received instruction from an Italian professor. He gave her twelve lessons and received three guineas. He then advised her not

to pursue the accomplishment. On the strength of this she told every one she had studied the pure Italian method, and screeched arias and bravuras with a vile pronunciation and soul-felt confidence.

"Oh, you must sing again," entreated Blake Beverley, "As I've been so unfortunate as to miss it."

"I will sing to *you* some other time," she said, dropping her eyes, which was not an effective proceeding owing to the shortness of the lashes and the undeniable crow's feet at the side.

"I like a sympathetic hearer, and I *feel* you would be that. You are young enough to be enthusiastic."

"I'm sure that's Rubenstein," he said, affecting an interest in the rattle of octaves—"sounds like one of his 'studies.' Wonderfully well played, really."

He gave a sigh of relief. The music was over. Surely Mrs. Loosely would return to her guests, and he might escape. He little knew the tactics of that lady.



They went into the room side by side, and on one pretence or another she kept him beside her. She introduced him to one or two people, then whisked him off again before he could say half a dozen words. She was intensely vain, and yet so afraid of being the dupe of her own vanity that she hated to introduce one of her "annexations" to any other woman.

She distrusted men, but she distrusted her own sex more.

Blake Beverley watched her and allowed himself to be paraded, and was half amused and half disgusted, and thought what was the use of women standing up and lauding their sex if this type were to exist and be an ever-visible proof of innate worthlessness and weakness?

"By the way, I've not been introduced to Mr. Loosely," he said at length. "You told me you had a husband, and though they're not of much account in these days, I should like to see him."

Mrs. Loosely stared. Such a re-

quest was altogether unusual, and distasteful.

"Oh, he's somewhere about," she answered, with visible annoyance. "He does n't care much for parties. We've very little in common."

She attempted a sigh, and the air of the misunderstood wife. Blake Beverley laughed.

"It's rather odd," he said, "how few of the present-day husbands *have* anything in common with their wives! Do you think marriage begins with Delusion and terminates in Discovery? From the way women speak of their lawful possessors, it leaves one in doubt as to whether a 'husband' is a male creature or only an appendage on which to hang a name and throw off liabilities."

Mrs. Loosely bit her lip.

"Husbands are an awful nuisance," she said. "A girl marries a man not knowing what he's like, and then has to live her life repenting it."

"Well, most of them seem to find the repentance rather amusing."

"We don't show our hearts,"

said Mrs. Loosely, pathetically. "We keep a smile for the world, but a tear for our hours of solitude."

"Point out Mr. Loosely, and I'll tell you whether you've shed many tears on his account."

"How you do harp on that string!" she exclaimed, fairly losing her temper. "He's not in the room."

"Another failing of the modern husband," remarked Blake Beverley; "or is it—consideration? He feels in the way, and effaces himself. The modern wife likes a platform to herself."

"That, I suppose, is an extract from your dear Mrs. Rashleigh's speeches?"

"Why do you call her *my* dear Mrs. Rashleigh?" he asked coolly. "It's flattering, but not correct."

"You appear to have moulded your views on hers," she said crossly. "I thought Irishmen were not straight-laced?"

Her eyes flashed interrogation and challenge. His were quite unreadable.

“I assure you,” he said, “there is no race so misunderstood. We are really prejudiced in favour of that present-day anomaly, the virtue of women. It’s one of our few prerogatives, and we cling to it.”

She gave one of her shrill laughs. “We’re getting quite prosy, I declare. It’s like Exeter Hall. Do you know, I’m quite sick of this eternal talk of Woman. It bores most of us, I think.”

“That is flattering to the Wise Sisterhood who are working so hard in your interests,” he remarked.

“But,” she said persuasively, with another glance, “don’t you think a just ordinary woman—soft, lovable, and not *too* particular, you know—is much nicer than those lecturing, strong-minded creatures?”

“Of course I do. But they’re rather rare nowadays.”

“Ah!” she said, with an arch look. “*You* oughtn’t to say that. I’m sure women could never be anything but nice to you. Oh, dear, you’re making me forget my duties.

I have to send these people down to supper. . . . No, not *you*. I want you to take me later on."

"Then I'll go and talk to my little reciting friend."

Mrs. Loosely nodded acquiescence. Grey hair in sausage rolls and an affected manner could n't be very dangerous. She allowed him to escape.

. . . . .

Some ten minutes later she went to look for him while the "Frumps" and notabilities were busy feeding. Little Miss Greenaway was sitting in a corner with a forlorn expression and a hungry interior.

"Your friend Mr. Beverley has just gone," she said plaintively, in answer to Mrs. Loosely's look of inquiry; "he left me quite suddenly; he said he had a bad headache, and I was to make his apologies to you."

Mrs. Loosely's pale lips tightened and shut in a word expressive, but not strictly feminine. It was "D——tion."

. . . . .

## XI.

“THROUGH A MAN’S EYES.”

“PHEW-W——” Blake Beverley drew a long, deep breath as the door closed, and he felt the cool night air upon his face. “Well, if I ever go *there* again !” he added, as he turned up the hill leading from Arum Gardens towards the open thoroughfare commanding the district of Northerton proper.

He paused to light a cigarette, glancing back at the square on which a glow of light was falling from a balcony hung with Chinese lanterns.

Some one was playing a waltz. He could hear the air distinctly. It was “After the Ball.” He leaned his arms on the low iron railings and stood there listening and moralising.

“Three types,” he thought, “and each so different. It is only a woman like *that*” (he looked towards the draped and lighted balcony, little imagining that its decorations had been carried out solely in his honour) “who can make one feel the utter hopelessness of efforts like Mrs. Rashleigh’s. How well they judge each other, . . . and what a contrast ! . . . Bird of Prey, indeed ; but there is something snake-like and venomous about her too. A dangerous friend, and a still more dangerous enemy. . . . Well, I was a fool to come, but, ’pon my word, she fairly drove me into it. What on earth possesses such a woman to think *I’m* attracted by her ! She is just the type I most dislike—bold, unfeminine, loud, overdressed, offensive to taste and sight. I pity her husband ! Good Lord ! how many men say that of women nowadays ! Marriage will be out of the question soon, and the married woman is solely to blame for it. She is the girl’s worst foe. Was the

Loosely woman ever a girl—ever that pure, soft thing of innocence and malleability that a man longs to love and cherish for himself ? ”

Then he laughed, and tossed aside the finished cigarette.

“ Nowadays, when he marries the innocence and malleability it is only to benefit some other man, who hears of a *vie incomprise*, and is offered the office of—consoler.”

He turned away, the soft waltz-music still floating on the still night air, and haunting him persistently as the hansom took him back to Woburn Place.

The events of the evening had annoyed him excessively. He could not understand that curious logic of the *femme galante* which appeared to class men of any artistic profession as public game, to be shot at, trapped, or openly fought for by feminine sportsmen.

Singer, actor, painter, writer—they could all tell the same tale ! All—did honour not forbid—publish records of effrontery, indecency, bold, un-



blushing pursuit—that called down shame on the name of women, and make their code of morality a thing for contempt.

“I’ve only spoken three times to the woman,” he thought disgustedly. “And yet I’ve had about twenty letters from her, half a dozen invitations which were really appointments, and two visits to my rooms on the most paltry excuse. A good thing I was n’t at home. . . . And yet women expect men to respect them, and applaud their cry for ‘Rights.’ Heaven knows they’ve taken most of our provinces from us already. I don’t know where they’ll stop.”

Then his brow clouded. “She—is so different, so straight, and honest, and *clean-minded*. By Jove! that’s getting rare. Women take up our lowest stories, point our jests, and want to claim kinship of vice with us! No man would dare tell a doubtful story to Mrs Rashleigh, and yet she’s so fearless. She calls sin by its proper name, and does n’t spare the sinner. But—

faugh ! . . . What broom in Woman's hands can ever sweep out the Augean stables of Modern Immorality? What lash of tongue or scourge of pen is strong enough to flay that immodest sisterhood whom Society has canonised ; who has studied adultery as a fine art, and woven moral ties and infamous pleasures into a chain of honour ; who parades her person, her desires, her lovers with the impudent effrontery of the harlot, and, unlike that poor victim of our laws and lawlessness, has neither excuse, nor scruple."

"Why, that's a bit of Rashleigh's play again ! By Jove ! he does hit hard. I wonder what his wife will think of it ? It certainly shows her the sex she is championing in a very different light. The 'Smart Modern Woman' and the Emancipated victim are rather opposite types. . . . Yet both are correct, I doubt not. . . . It's very odd I should have made the acquaintance of both, and just at the very time when I'm go-

ing to act up to them. Lady Warrender and Mrs. Fred Golightly are certainly contrasts, but decidedly life-types ! ”

He leaned back and half closed his eyes, and began to murmur over his part till the cab stopped.

It only wanted a week now of the production. The scenery was complete, and two dress rehearsals would ensure the necessary smoothness of the performance as a whole. Manager and company were equally delighted with the play, and equally certain it would “run.”

It was a comedy with just that undercurrent of pathos that goes home to the heart—pathos expressed rather than spoken ; a piece that breathed *life* ; that was caustic to the shams of the day, yet not too bitter to the shamers ; that playfully satirised Society without absolutely lecturing it on its incurable idiocy ; that showed redeeming points even in weak characters, and noble instincts buried under the dead-weight of worldly follies—fol-

lies which have been condemned and condoned since the day that fig-leaves ceased to be a fashionable article of attire.

Blake Beverley enjoyed every word of it, . . . had thrown himself heart and soul into the part, and by his intense vitality and enthusiasm awakened kindred feelings of enjoyment in the other actors.

The piece *lived* from beginning to end.

The brilliance of the dialogue, the rapid cut and thrust, the familiar allusions, the scathing satire, were just what Society loves. The plot was simple but ingenious. The dramatist of the present day makes no great demands on his audience. He prefers to amuse rather than mystify. The success of the Modern Play depends on light touches and brilliant dialogue, and that sense of *realism* which shows little difference between the drawing-room of Society and that of the Stage, and is therefore so "delightfully true to life," that Society flocks

to see it, and the Great Public, to whom Society is but an infinitesimal proportion, follows on the heels of its leaders, to criticise their doings, and marvel at their dresses.

But underlying his enthusiasm respecting "The New Woman," which was the title Mr. Hex Rashleigh had bestowed on his "Comedy of Modern Errors," was a very serious and earnest desire—the desire to reconcile two opposed yet noble natures—the desire to bring into harmonious agreement opinions that were at present arrayed in wilful misapprehension.

Both had in them so much that was admirable, so much that was noble, lofty, high-minded, and yet both struggled and suffered apart, when they might have worked so admirably and usefully together.

He knew the husband loved the wife with an intense devotion, and a reverent admiration for her gifts of mind and her noble if mistaken ideals. Of the wife's feelings he could not so well judge. But he

felt sure that to find she had married a man who could lift himself above the common herd, who also could *think*, work, and act in consonance with such abilities, would awaken her long-closed sympathies, and open her heart to that one great lesson Life had still to teach—Love—Love of some sort—the love that can make a home, and bring even personal failings and weakness into the soft glow of human affections.

It seemed to him that Marion Rashleigh had never lived a woman's natural life. She appeared to have held herself aloof from it, and then learnt to despise it.

She lived in a difficult age—an age of communists and clamourers and too-liberal thinkers. Their incessant restlessness had affected her, and she had adopted many of their theories and armed herself with much of their intolerance. Between this region and that next strata where no one even thinks at all, except it be of the feeble excitement of pleasure, she had placed herself on a foothold

of Endeavour. As yet Endeavour had been a thankless taskmaster who bade her make bricks without straw, and grumbled unceasingly at the quality of her work.

Young as he was, Blake Beverley was clear-sighted and a good judge of character. He owed this in some measure to his nationality, but in a greater measure to his art. His life had been varied—full of contrasts, difficulties, and opposition. Hard work had alternated with delightful gleams of leisure when he could sit alone and contemplate Fame—such fame as the author and the actor and the artist behold from afar—a Promised Land whose glory looks all the more beautiful because it seems impossible to obtain a nearer view.

No class is at once so hopeful and hopeless, so quickly elated, so rapidly despondent. Yet to no class are the ephemeral triumphs of the hour so delightfully prophetic—perhaps because they are so dearly bought.

If Blake Beverley had not been unselfish he would have been specu-

lating now on his own chance of success. It is not given to every young actor to have a thoroughly satisfactory part for a first appearance on the London boards. They have been known to anticipate Fame from a footman's livery and the handling of a plated salver.

Blake Beverley was a little more ambitious than this ; yet it was of the author he thought, and rarely of himself—the author who was as timorous as a school-girl over her first essay of versification, and as nervous as a race-horse owner with an untried colt ; the author who for years had submerged his own talents, desires, ambitions, in deference to a wife who scarcely noted his existence, who looked upon him as a mere nonentity because he was only patient, and troubled herself not one whit over his idiosyncrasies.

So many go through life with a stone wall of incomprehension between their respective natures—a barrier that, slight at first, grows higher and stronger with every year they live.



Sometimes Accident or Death razes it to the ground, and lets in the glad light of day; but very rarely does such light shine while Time and Life may atone for the long darkness or rejoice in the sunshine of happiness.

Marion Rashleigh, going about the labours she had set herself, striving persistently for that ideal which looked so glorious, and was, alas ! so impossible, was becoming daily more and more conscious of the "something" lacking in it all, and in herself. An element of warmth, of tenderness, a longing to lean on another's strength and say, "Guide—and I will follow."

It was treason to her preconceived ideas, treason to the noble army of Emancipators whose motto was, "Follow, while I guide."

The sense of her own power had grown less confident. An insight into richer and more rational possibilities had lessened her self-esteem and awakened a curious feeling of distrust in her mission.

It seemed to her that she had been

groping in a valley without ever lifting her eyes to the noble hill-tops that surrounded it. She wanted to climb those hills at last, to escape from the rank miasma of the lower world and get into a purer, clearer, and more spiritual atmosphere. The despair that is inseparable from all great aims had fastened on her soul, and shown her the impossibility of the task she had attempted.

Who can make one long straight level road of Life, purge the uncleanness of Human Nature, crush out the Beast and elevate the Angel?

Not any Human Effort, however strong, or however worthy.

A little we may do—we who sorrow—not for sexual weakness, but for Life's ordained martyrdom ; a little, just to point to the error, to lament the fall, to entreat and warn, but not condemn.

The Greatest Human Example that life has ever known preached Pity and Pardon. Shall we, so far below His virtues and His faith, do less?

## XII.

### A "FIRST NIGHT."

THE Piccadilly was a charming little theatre which had started into life with a "silver spoon" of success in its greedy little maw, and flourished and prospered accordingly.

Its owner and manager was also its leading actor, and stood unrivalled as an exponent of elegant comedy. His name spelt popularity, and his taste was a synonym for perfection.

Armed with a keen insight into the virtues and vanities, uses and abuses of Fashionable Life and nineteenth century morality, he rang the changes on these with skill little short of marvellous. A gentleman *au bout des ongles*, a wit and a scholar,

Tip of his  
finger

it is little wonder that his name ranked high in the list of celebrities, and that he was as welcome in the drawing-rooms of Belgravia as in the "outer" world of Bohemia.

Being clever and cultivated he favoured both, but preferred the latter. He had a quick eye for talent, and by happy chance it had lighted on Blake Beverley. The latter was just concluding a long provincial engagement, and was only too delighted to accept a part in a new play which the manager was thinking of producing. It had been brought to his notice in course of conversation at a very Bohemian Club indeed, where the members drank "bitter" or half-and-half, and ate nothing more substantial than bread-and-cheese. But in this atmosphere and under this *régime* wit seemed to flow apace, and there it was that "Charley" Wilton, as his *intimes* called him, found himself cheek by jowl with a quiet, sober-looking individual whose quaint stories and caustic speeches kept the "house" in a roar.

Said Charley, in a moment of expansion, "My dear fellow, *that* in a play would bring all London."

Said the quiet individual, "Here is the play"—and produced Act I.

This was the beginning. Now after long wrangles, delays, battles with the company, and rows with the scene-painters had dawned that curious electrical, indescribable occasion when nerves are at a premium, and excitement is the presiding god—a "First Night."

First nights at the Piccadilly were always full of interest, and a credit to the booking-office. Every box and stall, every dress circle and upper circle were sold long before the eventful evening. The dresses and jewels would not have disgraced a gala night at Covent Garden, and the floral decorations were a dream of beauty.

When the orchestra commenced one of those little gems for which the conductor was famous, and such as no other theatrical orchestra ever dreamt of attempting, the pretty little house was quite full.

Society often condescended to dine an hour earlier in order to be present at a First Night of "Charley Wilton's." They were unique, and things not to be missed or lightly regarded.

Besides, he was so original. Who but this man of Luck and Enterprise would have dreamt of producing a new comedy by a new author of whom no one had ever heard, and whom no one could say anything about?

After judicious "puffs" in society papers, and hints at the price of the leading actress's gowns, society had languidly inquired, "Who wrote the piece?" It found the question unanswerable, and was faintly curious, as is the manner of society, when it really *can't* find out what it wants.

Belgravia laid traps for "Charley" in the shape of exquisite luncheons, but he was not to be won over.

"It's a secret," he said. "The man won't put his name to the play, and I expect I'll have to put him in charge of a couple of policemen on

the night to get him there. He's sure to be called, and he well deserves it ; but a more modest, nervous fool it's never been my lot to meet."

Pretty ladies felt more curious than ever. "Perhaps," they suggested, "a woman had written it. Women did everything nowadays, from mountaineering to editing medical journals !"

The manager shook his head. "No, it's no woman's work this, though your sex gets it *hot*. However, you must judge for yourselves."

And here they were to judge : all the pretty, well-gowned, frivolous throng who chirp and chatter through life as if the "season" meant its be-all and end-all.

The languid club dandies, the Piccadilly *flâneurs*, the swells who proclaimed themselves "stone broke" and yet were faultlessly dressed, and never dreamt of denying themselves a half-guinea stall, a half-crown buttonhole, or an almost priceless Havannah. There, too, were the well-known critics, that terrible body

in whose power it lies to lift to fame or dash into destruction the work on which a fellow-creature's life and bread may depend. There, too, the pit, a critical and business-like minority who were not to be won or bought over, but determined to show if they liked the piece or not.

In fact, the audience was representative, and offered its distinctive types as a compliment of awakened interest.

Mrs. Hex Rashleigh and Mrs. Despard sat together in a small box on the second tier, a better place for seeing the stage than being seen of the audience. Their gowns were as usual distinctive of their respective tastes.

Mrs. Despard's was a delicious tone of pink, Mrs. Hex Rashleigh's a sombre but rich-coloured harmony of dead gold and terra cotta brocade. It was cut slightly away at the throat and bordered from there to the shoulders with a falling collar of Venetian point. She looked very handsome and very distinguished. Excite-



ment had lent a slight flush to her cheek and a wonderful glow to her deep brown eyes.

From time to time she exchanged bows with some notable or celebrated person. Occasionally glasses were turned to her, and people said, "Oh, is that *the* Mrs. Hex Rashleigh? . . . Did n't she write *Gillian*? and has n't she very peculiar views?"

And being informed that she was *the* Mrs. Hex Rashleigh, and certainly did hold peculiar views, they dropped their glasses and began to criticise each other's dresses.

But at last the curtain rose, and attention was claimed by the business of the evening.

As the act proceeded, a curious puzzled look came into Mrs. Hex Rashleigh's eyes. There seemed something familiar about the speeches—something strangely like those she had heard of late from Blake Beverley, and once from her own husband.

The stage husband, Lord Warrender, and his friend, Captain

Blarney O'Connor, were discussing the position of the former in his brief experience of married life. Lady Warrender, it appeared, had made the acquaintance of an American woman who was positively rabid on points of Sexual Equality, and the long-enacted tragedy of Woman's Wrongs. This woman, Mrs. Cornelius G. Dobbs, had acquired great influence over the impulsive Lady Warrender, and so worked upon her feelings, and her purse, that she made her husband's life wretched, besides encroaching largely on his means in order to support the various "Guilds," "Missions," and "Organisations" of Mrs. Cornelius G. Dobbs.

Lord Warrender—a good-natured if somewhat ordinary man—was made perfectly miserable, his house turned into a "meeting place" for females of strong minds—and stronger voices. Comforts he had none. Friends were drifting rapidly away in terror of the sex who denounced them on every occasion. Such little pleasures as

a smoke, a B. and S., or an occasional late night at the club, were held up as vices of the worst description. His *past* was continually being brought up, and his future predicted, but no one thought of the martyrdom he was enduring as his Present.

Into the *mêlée* dropped, like a bomb-shell of discord, a friend of his youth just retired from active service, a rollicking, jovial, fun-loving, dare-devil Irishman, a man who described himself as being "cared for by too many women ever to find time to care for one;" a man who entered his friend's beautiful town house sure of a welcome, and anticipating pleasant society, and found only a victim cowed by infuriated females, and totally ignored by the wife of a year.

Long and earnest was the consultation between the two men. The Irishman put on his mettle, advised a total "turning of tables," and drew out a plot that commended itself to every man in the audience and made the women exchange glances.

A soft ripple of laughter escaped

Mrs. Despard's lips. "Do you know, dear," she said, "it's rather like *you*."

Mrs. Hex Rashleigh frowned and bit her lip. She saw the likeness only too plainly. But vengeance was at hand. Straightway swept onto the stage, gorgeously gowned, pretty as a picture and witty as a *Parisienne*, the Woman of the Play—a chattering, frivolous, yet delightful creation; a Frou-Frou who dares all, and defies all, who is naughty to her finger tips—in speech—yet, despite the type, straight enough in action; a woman who dissected her every feeling and emotion with the most delicious effrontery, and while offending every canon of taste, yet made herself enchanting.

She had come to call on Lady Warrender. Not finding her in the drawing-room she had wandered into the library and discovered there an old friend in Captain Blarney O'Connor.

In five minutes Mrs. Fred Golithly seized the situation and offered herself as part of the plot.

"You tackle the women, O'Connor," she said, "leave the men to me."

"And where," asked Lord Warrender, "do I come in?"

"You'll make love to me," she said coolly. "Real love, *hot* love, mind! No namby-pamby stuff. If you can rouse up a spark of jealousy in your wife your case is n't hopeless, and if she gets cross so much the better. Life's too short to be unforgiving—after thirty."

"Lady Warrender is only twenty-three," said her husband.

"Oh! so much the better. She has n't outlived ideals. You must let Blarney there play up to her. No woman can resist him—in the moonlight."

Lord Warrender looked alarmed. "I—I did n't bargain for that," he said.

"Of course not. That's where the fun comes in. We must all make sacrifices in a good cause. I have to keep my temper with Mrs. Cornelius G. Dobbs. Hitherto we have only

exchanged discourteous sniffs ! You won't let her order me out of the house, will you ? I love a man to be masterful. All women do, though they won't say so. You can't respect a dummy, not that you're a dummy, but you're in a good way to become one. Take courage, I won't let you succeed."

It was Mrs. Hex Rashleigh's turn to glance at Mrs. Despard.

"Do you know, dear," she said softly, "it's—rather—like you."

Their eyes met. Instinctively they glanced at their programmes.

"Anonymous, I do declare !" exclaimed Véloutine, savagely. "Some one has been taking us off, Marion. It's as clear as daylight."

Mrs. Hex Rashleigh was silent. Her attention fled back to the stage, now a scene of animation.

Lady Warrender and Mrs. Cornelius G. Dobbs had returned from the meeting. They entered the library, expecting to find it untenanted, and discovered Lord Warrender and his friend smoking, and Mrs. Fred

Golightly perched on the arm of a chair, displaying faultless ankles and wonderful boots.

The attempt to reconcile school-girl friendship with her new principles made Lady Warrender exquisitely embarrassed. Stern, denunciatory, condemning, sat Mrs. Cornelius G. Dobbs, gazing at the group, and deaf to the blandishments of the Irishman. Mrs. Golightly asked for tea, and annexed Lord Warrender. Her conversation was full of hints of "other days," and the charms and chances of widowhood. Lady Warrender grew more and more uncomfortable.

In vain were freezing glances and curt speeches. Mrs. Golightly rattled on the more daringly. She made fun of "views," and tore Emancipation into shreds with her satires.

Mrs. Cornelius G. Dobbs grew furious, and was reminded that this was not *her* house—yet.

The curtain fell on an irate denunciation, to which the only answer was a peal of laughter, rich, riotous,

infectious, that sent the house into kindred mirth. Lord Warrender entreated Mrs. Golightly and the Irishman to come back to dinner.

“Not to-night,” vetoed his wife, “I ’m engaged.”

“I ’m sorry, my dear,” answered the husband, “but I ’m *not*.”

“Oh, of course I ’ll come,” said *the* Woman. “We ’re so independent now we don’t need chaperones, and, as I ’m a host in myself, you, Lord Warrender, can play hostess! *Vive la liberté!*”

CURTAIN.



## XIII.

### THE MORAL OF THE PLAY.

THE comedy rattled along, producing complications, tears, griefs, laughter. The wife, her heart racked by jealousy, saw the man she loved drifting from her side, and learnt, by the light of another woman's eyes, to read a character whose strength and patience and fidelity she had ill rewarded, and never cared to understand.

Very bitter was the learning of the lesson; very sharp the thorns of outraged pride which pierced her again and again; very cruel the awakening when Love tore the bandage from her eyes and showed her what she had lost by the contrast of what "might have been."

Without being didactic the comedy taught its own moral. That extremes are to be avoided ; that a certain amount of " give and take " is absolutely necessary ; that life cannot be all good or all bad, but has its lights and shades, its degrees of excellence and inferiority ; that woman may and can help man, but more often hinders him by going the wrong way about it ; that to irritate and abuse and circumvent him is not the way to win a higher place in his opinions, or advance her own ; that mutual sympathy and mutual esteem can work together for the good of both sexes, while opposition and defiance will improve neither.

" Good-natured men are not all fools," said Mrs. Golightly, " any more than people who take wine are all drunkards ! All women are not virtuous, but all men are not immoral ! To obliterate the contrasts of good and bad lessens the charm of one and the example of the other. Nature is perplexing in its developments, but delightful in its variations.

The difference between man and woman is the sole law of their mutual attraction. If you make them exactly alike they 'll lose all interest for each other. . . . If they do marry, for decency's sake—it will be as much a matter of course as pairing your stables, or preserving your game.

. . . . .

The third act held the house breathless.

Comedy had become almost tragedy. The flighty woman of the world, the delightful Frou-Frou, with her fastness and smartness and eccentricity, had been caught in her own toils. She had grown to care with all the heart she possessed for the man whose mock love for her was stabbing his wife's soul through and through with jealous pain. Then came an admirable scene between the two women—the one accusing the other of ruining her happiness, the other with her glib tongue and aching heart defending her wiles, and proving with feminine logic that what was

unappreciated by one person was quite justified in seeking the regard of some one else.

“What good were you to your husband?” she coolly inquired. “Did you ever give him sympathy, companionship, affection? Did you ever consult his tastes, or consider his desires? Did you ever deny yourself a whim or a want in deference to his wishes? No, you neglected home and duty, and took yourself off with a set of ranting, irrational beings—those Hermaphrodites of modern life who claim to be above considerations of sex, and, while denying its most sacred obligations, take refuge under its banner of Defencelessness! How dare you blame me if I step into your place! You say I stole your husband’s love; I maintain you offered it as the price of your own freedom. Now—you may claim that freedom if you will. He offers you his house for your Woman’s Guild, his fortune for the propagation of your foolish doctrines; but he takes from you what

you never valued—his own great, loving heart.”

There was not a sound in the house except one low, heart-broken cry from the young, unhappy wife.

Then she lifted her face, pale, agonised, beautiful beyond all words.

“If I have lost his love,” she said, “have *you*—gained it?”

For a moment that terrible struggle between good and evil in a woman's nature, the tempting of passion, the ignoble prompting of rivalry, swayed the worldly woman's whole soul. . . . So easy it would be to say “yes,” to erect the barriers of pride between the man's silent endurance and the woman's crushed and humiliated heart. So easy, . . . and yet at the crucial moment she failed.

“So like a woman,” said the critics.

So like a woman! But God be praised that at such crises as these she is more true to her sex than even that sex would have her. That something noble and self-sacrificing springs to life, a spark fanned to flame, and though the flame burns

and scorches till the tender flesh cries out in agony, it rarely fails to sanctify the very suffering it has caused.

So ended the comedy.

The "new woman" is after all but fashioned on the old, old pattern. Touch her heart, and all her caprices and vagaries are cast to the winds. Claim her nobility and endurance, and rarely do they fail to respond to that call.

The curtain fell on husband and wife reconciled and understanding one another as but for this lesson they would never have done, while Mrs. Cornelius G. Dobbs fingered a large cheque in the background and announced that English women had no "grit," and that she should go back to "Amurrca" the very next packet and leave the guild to get on as best it could.

. . . . .

"Marion, I believe you're actually crying!" exclaimed Mrs. Despard, under cover of the thunders of ap-

plause which rang through the house and brought actors and actresses again and yet again before the curtain.

"Hush! . . ." said Mrs. Hex Rashleigh, nervously, and laying a strangely trembling hand on the bare white arm. "They're calling author. . . . *Now* we shall know!"

For long it seemed as if no response was intended to that call. Louder, fiercer, more imperative the cry swelled and roared, till even the languid swells of the stalls took it up, and insistence threatened to develop into tumult.

Then at last the curtain was raised, and the whole stage stood revealed. The actors and actresses were grouped in the background, and there, literally *supported* by the grasp of Charley Wilton and Blake Beverley, was the shrinking figure and dead-white face of Hex Rashleigh.

. . . . .

Mrs. Hex Rashleigh's face grew as

white as that on which she gazed. Her limbs failed. She sank back in her seat.

“Gracious Heavens! . . . My husband!” she faltered.

An hour later she sat in her own room alone.

All the fruits of years of labour were strewn around her. They lived in the crowded book-shelves, they faced her in pamphlets and journals; they were the very atmosphere of this quiet, studious place where she had lived and thought and worked in that one groove which had suddenly been flashed before her as a mistake!

All her ideas were in confusion. Her castle of ambition seemed only a castle of cards, overthrown and tumbling ignominiously about its architect.

This man—this being of no importance, had at one stroke demolished it. . She had thought him a blind, foolish, witless creature, with no opinions worth considering, and



no gifts deserving credence, and all the time he had been working, studying, and finally accomplishing a success that swept her own feeble efforts into nothingness. He had reached a higher platform than she could climb, had spoken and been understood while she had only been tolerated. He had been able to call the world of art and culture, society and work, to hear *him*, and had not only won their praise, but touched their hearts.

No effort of hers had ever done *that*; no tears of awakened sympathy, no throb of answering feeling had been the guerdon of her life's endeavour. It had been all hard, thankless, mistaken labour, and he, the man whose name she bore, whose claims she had ignored, had just quietly bided his time, and studied her as a doctor studies the progress of a disease, until the time was ripe for a blow.

The next day his name would be all over London. Before a week that same London would be crowding to see the piece, and those who

knew her would recognise the cruel fidelity of the portrait, and *name* it too.

"The New Woman," . . . was that her type? The woman satirised so mercilessly, and yet sketched so lovingly, with the strong brain denying the tender heart, and the heart coming out conqueror in the end.

How those speeches rang in her ears! How strangely her first sense of indignation had evaporated! She felt as one who, braced to deliver a tremendous blow, strikes but the empty air.

"Is he right? . . . Am I wrong?" she cried piteously, and the womanhood within her cried out to the forces of suppression like prisoners long stifled for want of air.

What a coil it all was! Right—Wrong. Which was which? Turn where one would, the same conflict, the same difficulties had to be faced.

She felt suddenly weak. Was man to be Ahasuerus after all, graciously extending his sceptre, and Woman,

only weak, loving Esther, thankful to touch it, and live?

The hot colour suffused her face in angry waves. She felt outraged, hurt, and something—was it Instinct or only Sex?—kept clamouring, “He is right!—he is right! The woman’s sphere begins with love, and by love alone she reigns. . . . He the Head and she the Heart. . . . So may Life’s best work be done!”

Gradually her wrath subsided. She began to think of the disturbing element in her house as an important factor in its future.

It was impossible to put him aside now, to regard him in that curious impersonal fashion which relegates the Unimportant Husband to the limbo of garret or cellar. Here, almost at her side, he had lived, and thought, and *worked*. That latter fact alone claimed her respect, even as the preceding ones only aroused her wonder.

No voice of encouragement; no friendly help; no mutual interest.

Nothing of that sweet sympathy so dear to the author's heart, which softens the stony road of toil so kindly.

Then she started, and again the hot colour sprang to her brow.

She remembered Blake Beverley.

This, then, was the meaning of that strange friendship. They had worked, talked, plotted together, and the young actor had employed himself in studying *her* as one of the types of woman so freely presented by the play.

No wonder Northerton had amused him. No wonder he had flirted with Mrs. Despard, and studied the wily tactics of the Bird of Prey.

All these women had been sport for him in their different fashions. They had come opportunely on the stage of his life, and been joyfully sacrificed at the shrine of art.

And yet—was he so much to blame?

They were true to life, and Blake Beverley had represented life to-

night. As he spoke to "Lady Warrender," so he had spoken to herself, and even as the stage heroine had felt and acknowledged the truth of his good-humoured strictures, so she, the living type, acknowledged them.

The chiming of the timepiece struck sharply on her ear, and reminded her how late was the hour.

For the first time she wondered if her husband had returned. For the first time it struck her that of all who had surrounded him, praised, encouraged him to-night, his own wife had stood aloof. He *knew*, in his own heart, that she was a thing apart from that Fame and all it might mean. To her he would only be as always—the Husband of no Importance.

"No doubt he is celebrating the occasion as men do," she told herself, bitterly. "Even fame only means to them an excuse for a 'big feed,' and an extra allowance of champagne or whisky."

But her conscience pricked her as she said it. She knew him so little, after all.

She turned out the light and abruptly left the room.

Was it only curiosity or the memory of one other night when she had sought this insignificant household appendage of hers, that turned her footsteps in the direction of his own dingy, lonely room?

Perhaps she did not wait to think, but only let Impulse lead her as it might have led a quite ordinary woman.

Her hand touched the door; it opened softly, and she stood silently on the threshold looking at the Unimportant Man whose name was on a thousand lips to-night.

He was seated at the untidy, littered table. Genius has often a very poor manger for its birthplace.

His arms were folded, his head bowed down on them.

For a moment she wondered why she had never noticed before those

manifold streaks of grey in the dark, ruffled hair.

He had not heard her entrance, but quietly and slowly he lifted his head, and then—he saw her.

His eyes were full of tears. She saw him in some foolish schoolboy fashion draw the old, worn coat-sleeve over his wet lids, and then all the frozen hardness of her heart seemed suddenly to break and fall asunder, and warmth and pity—the pity so near akin to Love—rushed swift as summer's rain through every pulse, and in her eyes too the hot tears rose, looking at that worn, tired face of his.

Half startled, half abashed, he looked at her, the beautiful folds of her theatre gown still falling round the grand harmonious lines of her figure. . . . He looked, and his hands went out to her entreatingly.

“Oh, my dear,” he said, “forgive me! I forgot that it might hurt *you*.”

Then she laughed ; but a sob caught the laughter and hushed it, and she was trembling like a child in his arms.

“It is you,” she cried, “who must forgive. You have taught me my lesson—to-night.”

THE END.



## THE AUTONYM LIBRARY.

---

Small works by representative writers, whose contributions will bear their signatures.

32mo, limp cloth, each 50 cents.

The Autonym Library is published in co-operation with Mr. T. Fisher Unwin, of London.

I. THE UPPER BERTH, by F. Marion Crawford.

II. FOUND AND LOST, by Mary Putnam-Jacobi.

These will be followed by volumes by other well-known writers.





711

12











UC SOUTHERN REGIONAL LIBRARY FACILITY



**A** 000 697 948 8

